

The Students' Voices in Developmental Education

by

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This dissertation explores community college students' perceptions and assumptions about developmental education in writing classrooms. The study focuses on students who have taken at least one developmental writing class at a two-year college, with an interest in those who chose not to continue their educational goals. The study uses grounded theory within an inductive framework; data was collected utilizing focus groups and interviews. While many studies have been conducted in the Developmental Education field, very few have centered on the voices of students. Current discussions across the nation about the fate of developmental writing education classes in higher education warrant a closer look not only at what is being done from an educator's standpoint, but also what students think about the knowledge and skills they have acquired in developmental writing classes. Specifically, this study has been guided by the question: How do students in developmental writing classes at a rural two-year college in North Carolina perceive the value of course content and instruction? This qualitative study of a single site develops a research heuristic that can be replicated in additional sites in order to better understand the complexities of developmental education as seen from the point of view of students. Overall, this study discovered knowledge that will assist faculty and administrators as they are challenged to redesign current developmental writing educational practices.

The Students' Voices in Developmental Education

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by

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Dedication

To my family. Without your love and support, my dream of earning a PhD would never have been fulfilled. I love you all very much.

To my faculty mentors at East Carolina University. Through your dedication and guidance, I have not only achieved a life-long dream but have a clearer understanding of what it means to be student-centered.

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To my students who have cheered me on along the way. I hope you understand how much I do listen to your perceptions about class, school, and life.

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Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.

Nor do I often want to be a part of you.

But we are, that's true!

As I learn from you,

I guess you learn from me---

~Langston Hughes, 1951, "Theme for English B", lines 34-38

Had I known all along that the labels they placed on me in high school were incorrect, I would have went to college sooner, and my family's situation would be a lot better than it is now. But I believed them when they called me LD, remedial, at-risk. So I let them put me in the classes where I sat bored to death, watching the other students be disruptive and disrespectful. Not being taught because we couldn't handle too much work. Not knowing I was more than what they said I was.

~ Community College Student, 2010

Chapter 1

Labeling the Student Writer

Introduction: What's in a Name?

February 25, 2011, at a NADE Conference in Washington D.C., I took a step outside of the expected and called the participants to task about the names we use to label the students we work with daily. The reasoning behind my motive spurred from several conversations with a few of my students at the end of the semester in the Fall of 2010 about their educational backgrounds, expectations, and revelations. None, however, stood out to me more than the student who was returning to school after many years in factory employment. Her initial story was similar to many of my other older students, but hers etched itself into my memory because of the passion she held for her new understanding that she could learn and was quite good at this “college thing.” After class one day, she asked to speak with me about her understanding of where she could go with her college experience based on her success so far. She was asking for mentorship based on my experience with her in the classroom; instead, she mentored me on what it means to be labeled, displaced, cast aside, and often forgotten educationally.

As the participants walked into my conference presentation, I handed to each a small note card. Each card revealed on one side a label we have used for students who are considered underprepared for a college level classroom. The other side of the card contained a relational message about the connotations of these labels by identifying the card holder as a worker of this type. Based on my research and experience, I included a brief synopsis of the assumptions educators and administrators appear to hold about people to whom we apply these labels. The following is a list of these terms and the relational assumptions:

Basic

As a basic worker, we understand that you are not able to work with complex concepts, so we will give you work that requires repetition and no critical thinking.

Nontraditional

As a nontraditional worker, we understand that you can't come to work on time and/or every day, that you cannot fully concentrate on your work, and that you are unable to give 100%, so we will provide you with a mentor and micromanagement to keep you on task and make sure you don't screw things up too bad for our organization.

Developmental

As a developmental worker, we understand that you are not quite ready to actually work, but we hope that with an unpaid position that trains you to become a real worker, you might be able to finally become a real employee of our organization. But, we must admit that we won't hold our breath since there is so much you don't know, and we don't trust your ability to think independently.

At-Risk

As an at-risk worker, we understand that your personal life overwhelms your ability to be a productive and efficient worker, so we will provide you with group collaborative work projects so your deficiencies don't stand out, and we won't expect you to be a leader of anything important for the organization.

Remedial

As a remedial worker, we have little hope that you can do anything more than stuff envelopes and deliver mail, and we are actually unsure about letting you deliver mail. We realize that the humane thing to do is find you a job somewhere so that you can have some semblance of independent living, but we don't trust you to perform any task without someone watching over you at all times.

Underprepared

As an underprepared worker, we recognize that it is not your fault. We will blame all educators and mentors who came before us for your lack of preparation for the real working world. We do, however, have hope that with enough training and your ability to imitate correct skill strategies that you will improve and maybe one day be able to work without us having to constantly correct you on even the most minor of details.

At the beginning of my presentation, I called out the labels: Basic, Nontraditional, Developmental, At-Risk, Remedial, Underprepared...an incomplete list of names we use to identify students who do not quite reach certain educational benchmarks at certain moments. Then I looked out to my audience to assess the reactions. Several people looked quite upset with me. In fact one participant was packing up her stuff to leave. I had received the expected result. Before the participant could leave, I addressed her and the others asking if I had made them upset. In unison a group of participants replied with a "Yes." "Good." I replied. "Do I have your attention then?" And the woman who was about to leave sat down.

I then questioned the group: What if you were called these names? What if these names and the assumed implications were related to your employment? How would you feel about your

office space and your coworkers if you walked around feeling labeled a basic worker or remedial employee?

As I assessed the audience again, I found a participant wiping her eyes. She was crying. Tears quietly streamed down her face. She saw me look at her, and she spoke: “I use these names. To my students, with my colleagues. I use these names.” Unable to finish her thoughts to us, she sat, wiping her tears, listening. At the end of the presentation, she asked for copies of all the cards. She intended to share them with her department.

During the presentation, I encouraged the participants to think about why we believe we can label someone without concern for the effect the label and underlying assumptions connected with the label may have on others. We have all been taught some variation of the old children’s rhyme that “sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” And as we grew in experience and knowledge, we learned the false truth within this rhyme. Words can hurt. The images and stereotypes associated with a word work with social and economic factors to create identities – some we accept, some we ignore, and many we wish we could run from, but we can’t. Instead, we carry with us the emotional and mental baggage connected with these labels in hope to move beyond the names and redirect our self to a new identity outside of those terms which have brought self-doubt, frustration, anger, defensiveness, and low self-esteem. I will concede that the meaning created for these words may have been well-intended by some and used to provide the best possible representation of a population of students during a time in which they were shunned on campus by most administration, faculty, and staff. As a teacher of students labeled basic, remedial, at-risk, developmental — and as a person who hears these words defined and redefined in front of students, in syllabi, in college mission statements and policies — I wonder why we haven’t moved beyond applying such names.

Most students who begin their college experiences in classes created to help prepare them for college level writing have been labeled one, some, or all of these terms throughout their educational careers and enter college in disbelief that they actually achieved something worthy of recognition because the real test is if they can make it at the college level. These labels have built an internal barrier for the students.

As educators, we need to recognize what our labeling has created and begin changing the way we represent our students. The first step in changing the name and redirecting the implications is to recognize and allow a space for student knowledge and experience to inform our pedagogy, our classroom, and our research. In this shared space, we may finally find that they are students. No signifier needed. Like all others on our college campuses who come to us for guidance and knowledge...students. And their experiences are worth listening to. Thus, this dissertation argues that students' perceptions and experiences *as students* (and as writers and as human beings) in developmental writing classes at two-year colleges should inform developmental writing redesign efforts by faculty and administrators.

Historical Perspectives of Labeling

The history of labeling students who are marked as needing assistance in improving writing skills to become "college level" writers in the United States is an old concept. As Jane Stanley notes in *The Rhetoric of Remediation*, "Throughout the 150-year history of composition instruction in American higher education, crises in students' literacy have been declared with regularity" (1). While the crisis of students lacking the illusive college level writing skills has been noted over the years by educators, the rhetorical constructs created to name and assess the participants within the crisis has repeatedly transformed depending on the institutional

perception of the students being placed in the developmental writing class, the availability of institutional resources, and the dominate opinion of what college level writing should look like for the students. Thus, as Kelly Ritter notes, the value placed upon the student who is marked as needing assistance in improving writing skills is intricately tied to the location of the institution and its perceived value in the market place of higher education (16). Consequently, the labels used have varied also according to localized perceptions of the students who are marked as lacking writing skills and inherent within the labels were the local assumptions and expectations about the students and the developmental writing class.

While it is true that higher education has always struggled with the supposed unskilled college level writer, because previously most of the students were from similar cultural and educational backgrounds, the resources used to assist these students in gaining the necessary skills was minor when compared to the population of students with writing needs years later. Stanley details how the rhetorical constructs of these students became a more common discussion within higher education as “the academy move[d] to embrace a population of students who had not previously been seen as ‘college material’” (2). Accordingly, educators found that the students labeled as unskilled increased in number and were more pedagogically challenging because of the variance of needs to improve the students’ writing skills. As Langston Hughes shows in his poem “Theme for English B,” the struggle for people who were not provided with the academic tools that would help them become successful in the rhetorical situation of higher education created an elusive beginning for those accepted into the newly open access colleges and universities. The institutions finally allowed minorities and people from the lower economic class who would need to learn the subjective concept of what college level writing meant; thus classes such as English A and English B began filling up with these students, yet the seats were

not full only of minorities, for as Hughes writes, “I am the only colored student in my class” (line 10). Nor were these classes a new concept. What did change was the way in which these students were termed and viewed by academia.

Complicating this pedagogical issue, in her study of The University of California, Stanley contends that the construction of the students who are deemed in need of writing improvement coupled with the terminology used to label them sufficed to secure the university’s “status among other institutions of higher education”; thus the students are used as a rhetorical tool to “define and defend its stature” (6). As institutions of higher education began to congratulate themselves for opening their doors to a diverse population of students, they were faced with an administrative dilemma as the new students brought to light that many students were not receiving what the institutions deemed as adequate secondary writing instruction. In order to remain open for a larger student population, the institutions had to find ways to help improve the writing skill sets of the students to meet the specified approved benchmarks for the certain institution at that time.

As early as the 1870’s, The University of California created “a conditioned caste” consisting of students who needed assistance in improving their skills in order to be successful in other college classes. By 1905, the concept of conditioning “gained currency nationwide” (Stanley 8), including at colleges such as Harvard. Yet none of the institutions that readily accepted the students who needed improvement wanted to truly accept these same students as college material. Too many changes had to occur at the institutions. The changes meant financial and employee resources would have to be invested, which was considered a flagrant misuse of “Harvard’s faculty and funds” (quoted in Stanley 7). Such hostility towards the programs because of the drain on institutional resources led many administrators and educators to look

poorly upon the students who needed the assistance and the faculty who taught them. The resentment was severe enough that even organizations such as the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of teaching “characterized the practice [of remediation] as ‘indiscriminate charity’” (quoted in Stanley 8). Hence, the students found themselves in an uncomfortable border space where they were simultaneously “embraced and disgraced” while the classes became what many still term as a necessary evil (Stanley 6). Despite the negativism surrounding the development of remedial classes in colleges, “by the late nineteenth century, most [colleges] were operating their own remedial education programs” (Cohen and Brawer 288), yet students were not seen as important resources for information when it came to the design and implementation of the remedial classes. With the inception of the community college, colleges and universities found new ways to deal with the burden of remedial classes:

More than half the states have regulations governing remedial instruction. Some have mandated that it not be offered in the public universities....Others have placed limits on the number of developmental courses a university may offer and directed the universities to arrange remedial instruction for their students with the community colleges, thus inflating their numbers of developmental students.

(Cohen and Brawer 293-294)

While the term *conditioning* had a short life span, the label of remedial writing took hold across academia and is still used at colleges today. *Remedial* is often interchanged with the other labels created to mark the students as lacking in college level writing skills. During the era of Shaughnessy, higher education saw an increase in discussions about the unskilled writer. As Ritter notes, “prior to the early 1970s, basic writing lacked the professional markers of a subfield—most notably the scholarship on basic writing theory and practice now found in

professional journals” (31). By the 1970’s, Shaughnessy had coined the term *basic* to refer to the students marked as underprepared (Ritter 31). This new label transformed the way educators approached the students because now instead of the lack of skills being the fault of the students who had been previously viewed as lazy or unable to grasp the necessary concepts, the issues became the fault of the students’ personal backgrounds; hence fixable through acculturation. According to Ritter,

Shaughnessy’s book reified the pedagogy and, by extension, the politics of the basic writing classroom, by classifying the basic writer not as deficient but as underprepared. This move shifts the origins of the teaching problem from the students themselves (and their own intellectual motivation) to the cultures and communities in which they are schooled. (29)

Within a few years, institutes of higher education began more readily labeling these unskilled writers as *Basic Writers* and providing non-credit-bearing courses for them to assist in developing their college level writing skills before sending them forward to the curriculum level classes, like English A and B at Harvard. Thus, the name *Basic Writer* took hold in institutions across the nation and the beginning of Developmental Education as we now know it took systematic root.

The educators charged with preparing the students for college level writing were often treated as poorly and unfairly as the Basic Writer. Distanced from the other students and educators, classes were often provided in dimly lit basement classrooms with only the barest of support provided in terms of funding and professional development. The students placed into these classes subscribed to the concept that receiving a college education would improve their lives. Many of these students aspired to challenging career goals, believing these goals to be

attainable; however, once accepted into college, they found these more difficult to be accomplished because first they had to obtain college level writing skills, thus lengthening their time in college and increasing the financial resources needed to pay for classes and books. As the students filled the remedial classrooms believing the advisors who told them the class would help them reach their goals, the institutions struggled:

How should they deal with someone who aspires to be an attorney but is reading at the fifth-grade level? Shunting these students to the trade programs was a favored ploy.... Another ploy was to offer a smattering of remedial courses where students would be prepared, more or less successfully, to enter the transfer courses—or entertained until they drifted away. (Cohen and Brawer 290)

In an attempt to prepare the students for the college transfer courses, the developmental writing classroom became a space for more than just writing skills. Still dependent on location, many colleges began using this educational space to acculturate the students for academia. In 1995, Hunter R. Boylan, Director for the National Center for Developmental Education, attempted to distinguish developmental education from the former constructs of the skill and drill pedagogy by extending the methodology of perceiving and teaching basic writing from past concepts of remedial writing. According to Boylan, “students fail to do well in college for a variety of reasons, and only one of them is lack of academic preparedness” (1). Consequently, over the years these non-credit-bearing classes included more than just a space for learning college level writing skills, which created new labeling for the students. Labels such as “remedial and developmental and, less often, compensatory and basic skills have been used more or less interchangeably for courses designed to teach literacy—the essentials of reading, writing, and arithmetic—plus broader skills for living—time management, how to study, coping with family

crises” (Cohen and Brawer 291-292). As *remedial*, *basic*, and *developmental* became the more accepted terms used to label students lacking college level writing skills, even the term *remedial* transforms to more closely match the concepts presented by Shaughnessy and Boylan. By 1999, *remediation* was more widely accepted as being defined “as activities for students who initially do not have the skills, experience, or orientation necessary to perform at a level that the institutions or instructors recognize as ‘regular for those students’” (Cohen and Brawer 290). Thus, the idea progressed that we must use this educational space to not only teach the writing skills but also to help the students develop the cultural behaviors and thinking necessary for college success. As such, the students were redefined as lacking in almost all aspects necessary for college culture; hence the students were not viewed as having anything important to add to the conversation during the design and development of the remedial education programs. And the labeling morphed once again from *remedial* and *basic* to the current term *developmental*.

While the goal of “promot[ing] personal and academic development” (Boylan 2) appears essential and with good intention towards assisting the students in reaching their college goals, including these other “necessary” skills for improvement within the developmental writing classroom provided for an increased separation of the student from the rest of the campus and other students, for now they not only are labeled as deficient or lacking in writing skills, but also in life skills. Thus, the student placed within the developmental writing classes became stigmatized even more as not college material, as separate from the rest of higher education, as less than college level material. Henceforth “basic writers are perpetually outsiders seeking a way into the world of academia—a world which is socially and demographically too much unlike their own” (Ritter 34). In light of this othering in areas beyond just writing skills, faculty and administrators who are charged with creating and redesigning developmental writing

curriculum must include within their considerations the perceptions and experiences of the students. As Malcolm Knowles emphasized in the 1970's, adult learners bring to the educational setting experiences, knowledge, and skills that require a different approach within the classroom and within curriculum design. How are we to understand such needs of our developmental writing learners if we don't asked them about their perceptions and experiences in the developmental writing classes? This dissertation serves as an exploration of how students perceive developmental writing classes and asks the question: How do students in developmental writing classes at a rural two-year college in North Carolina perceive the value of course content and instruction? This qualitative study of a single site develops a research heuristic that can be replicated in additional sites in order to better understand the complexities of developmental education as seen from the point of view of students.

Background and Context

Across the nation, Developmental Studies educators working in commissions formed by state legislatures are attempting to discover how best to redesign developmental studies curricula in order to better assist students who struggle to move forward from developmental education classes at the community college. These research and redesign committees are driven by student persistence studies which suggest that the majority of students who begin their community college experience in developmental classes do not complete their college education (Aud et. al. 72). The lack of persistence has become center stage in the national discussion for student retention and completion as witnessed by the White House hosting its first summit for Community Colleges on October 5, 2011, with regional summits and virtual summits following (United States, U.S. Dept. of Education slide 27). The center piece for these summits was

President Obama's College Completion agenda in which he tasked community colleges by "calling for an additional 5 million community college graduates by 2020" (United States, Office of the Press Secretary). Furthermore, the educational statistics reported by The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems suggesting that the current generation of college-aged students will be less educated than their parents' generation, with fewer attaining bachelor's and/or graduate degrees, has heightened the intensity for redesign. Billions of dollars are being spent on research, committees, and prototypes, yet one noticeable piece is missing from the puzzle: The students' voices.

An understanding of the disparity from the students' perspectives becomes increasingly important as our employment fields require more education, and the lines of recently unemployed find that their skill sets no longer match basic requirements in our technological economy. Potential employers are increasingly demanding education beyond a high school diploma for new hires (Aud et. al. 59). Coupled with this educational attainment, the person needs a diverse repertoire of skills as she navigates the dictated work load that is intricately linked with technology. No longer is knowledge just about reading and writing and arithmetic, nor does the vocational student work solely with the tools of the trade. In order to graduate, students now must show mastery in reading, writing, and arithmetic within the framework of our digital and networked age, which includes the use of personal computers, online educational components, and complex computer programs. Literacy, therefore, is redefined as the "skills involved in operating linguistically within the context of electronic environments, including reading, writing, and communicating" (Selfe 11). Recognizing how learning, literacy, and success now includes digital skills, the MacArthur Foundation has begun researching connected learning with a goal of "mak[ing] education more powerful for all students by creating more

opportunities for more youth to engage in learning that is relevant to their lives and prepares them for success in school, the workplace, and their community” (MacArthur). Thus redefining literacy in connection with digital media is of great concern for not only the local employers that community colleges work closely with but also the community college administration that is constantly trying to keep the school up-to-date with current technological practices within education in order to best prepare students for current and future success.

A digital and networked age drives the basic requirements of most positions to call for some type of higher educational training. Without the certificates and/or degrees, people are left with few stable options for employment, options that would help them out of the minimum wage cycle. Lawrence E. Gladieux, Executive Director for Policy Analysis from the College Board, emphasized such stark realities for the livelihood of many when he spoke in a special committee session and stated: “There are no guarantees in life with or without a college diploma, but the odds are increasingly stacked against those with the least education and training. The more years of formal education one has, the more, on average, one earns.” According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, in 2008, almost half of the incoming freshmen at community colleges began their formal education with Developmental Education classes. Thus, they began the training that would help them earn more money for their family, yet they didn’t really begin their training because first they had to “catch up.” And catching up becomes even more pressing when the student is faced with the most current earning report from the U.S. Department of Education, which states that “young adults ages 25–34 with a bachelor’s degree earned more than twice as much as young adults without a high school diploma or its equivalent, 50 percent more than young adult high school completers, and 25 percent more than young adults with an associate’s degree” (“Educational Capital” 56). Constantly aware of the financial consequences of not

moving forward quickly into credit-bearing classes, students are presented with a seemingly insurmountable task. And the majority doesn't succeed.

One third of the incoming freshman class enters college underprepared for the demands of college academics (Aud et. al. 70 and "Table 241"). Underprepared students are not a new problem for colleges and universities, especially for writing. As Jane Stanley notes, "Throughout the 150-year history of composition instruction in American higher education, crises in students' literacy have been declared with regularity" (1). However, the outcry from organizations like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation about the current state of developmental education in America has spurred restlessness throughout the educational system because graduation becomes even more elusive for the student entering into the lowest developmental classes. In their study about developmental education and "gatekeeper" English and math courses in relation to student outcomes, Roksa and Jenkins, et al. discovered that "if the majority of students are not even reaching these early educational milestones, they will certainly not make it to the point where they earn credentials" (39). Thus the blame game for the lowered rates of persistence and graduation often falls onto the shoulders of developmental faculty.

Within this environment is the struggling student who begins her college experience with hope for a better future for herself and her family only to find disappointment as the barriers pile up and the gatekeepers fight amongst each other. Institutional and classroom discourses assist in the construction of the student as either a part of the college community or separate from it. Thus, a student who enters a two-year college but is placed in developmental courses navigates a unique path that defines her as "developmental" until she reaches credit-bearing classes. At some colleges, students are not allowed to claim a major until developmental work is completed, while at other colleges students are given one advisor while enrolled in developmental classes and

another advisor once their schedule is predominantly credit-bearing classes. Such confusing and exclusionary practices have been defended as necessary for the development and growth of the individual who otherwise would fall through the cracks. Yet, at the end of the day, graduation is still illusive because “remediation is broken, producing few students who ultimately graduate. Sadly, efforts intended to catch students up are most often leaving them behind” (“Time is the Enemy” 3). But what does the student think of remediation and developmental writing classes? Does the student perceive her placement separating her (intellectually or physically) from the rest of the student body? Does the student perceive the developmental writing classroom as a productive space for gaining the knowledge needed to be successful in future credit-bearing courses?

If only a small percentage of community college students graduate with a certificate and/or degree, what happened to those who don’t persist? What makes the successful student’s struggle surmountable while so many others fall behind? What could improve the chance of greater success? Do opportunities and activities in the developmental writing classroom adequately prepare students for credit-bearing classes?

In light of this ever looming debate about the future of developmental writing education, this dissertation project examines students’ perceptions and assumptions about their developmental writing education experiences to discover knowledge that will assist faculty and administrators as they are challenged to redesign current Developmental Education practices in the writing classroom. Specifically, this study has been guided by the question: What are student perceptions of the value of course content and instruction practices in developmental writing classes at a rural two-year college in North Carolina? From this guiding question, my research has discovered that students’ perceptions and experiences as students in developmental writing

classes at two-year colleges should inform developmental writing curriculum redesign efforts by faculty and administrators. Using students' perceptions and experiences to inform curriculum redesign will produce courses that best meet the needs of those students.

Literature Review

During the past 5 years, presidents of community colleges, administrators at the community college systems level, higher education think tanks and research organizations, as well as the President of the United States have remarked on the research and statistics published by The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems in that for the first time in American history, the current generation will not exceed the former generation in numbers of college degrees attained. Instead, the current generation will have fewer degrees from higher education, and those who do attend colleges or universities will have a lower retention rate than ever before ("Educational Capital"). While the intent of those who share the research and statistics from The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems is to focus on the new federal and state initiatives to increase retention rates within higher education, often the remarks reflect evidence of a changing environment that includes a drastic modification of the perceptions and realities of obtaining a post-secondary degree and the increased difficulty in completing the academic expectations in higher education.

Although we would like to believe that human agency designs personal outcome, whether it be success or failure, in reality we are often directed by the structures set in place from various positions of power. Within a classroom, such power does not rest solely with the instructor. A student's learning outcome is directly related both to the instruction and the curriculum mandates established by administrators at the local, state, and federal levels. Accordingly, the system is

designed with the student as a mute bystander. For a developmental writing student, such powerlessness is overwhelming and can reinforce feelings of inadequacy if a student is not provided the opportunity for what Pierre Bourdieu conceives as the need for improved habitus and capital within the field—the field for this research being the developmental writing classroom (56). Bourdieu contends that habitus—human action—is based on a person’s cultural upbringing as well as “a certain state of the chances offered” by those with power within the structures (64). These chances offer the person opportunities to gain skills and capital needed to exchange for power or authority within a context, one being higher education. With such a large number of students being placed into developmental writing classes and with a small number succeeding, it is important to reflect on what the system has set into place with the intent to help students gain the habits, skills, and capital to be successful in the developmental writing classroom and beyond as well as listen to the students’ perceptions of the value of course content and instruction in the developmental writing classroom in order to better understand why the break is occurring.

In 1991, Bela Banathy argued that the education system was stuck in industrial ideology with the remedies for educational crisis being adjustments in the existing system (8). Tracking the historical economic ideology and social perceptions framing the education system, Banathy shows how our educational system shifted in the 1880’s from a system designed to educate a nation, to a system reformed to civilize immigrants. Contextualizing the decision with the backdrop of economic success for our country being dependent on securing an industrial work force, educational institutes at the primary and secondary levels became important learning environments for the repetitious work required of industrial workers, most of whom were new immigrants. Thus, the curriculum formed through such a system focused more on repetitive

drills, obeying rules (both discipline specific and social), and assimilation into American culture, all elements of education that do not perceive the student as having agency, as having anything important to say in regards to curriculum design and pedagogy. The student needed only to obey the authority of those who knew best for them.

Within this industrial based systematic approach to education, any issues that arise within the education system are dealt with as the crisis evolves and are mainly “fixed” with reformation of specific parts within the system, while leaving the design of the system intact. As a result, educational administrators accept the system’s design and follow the same precepts of fixing only what comes into crisis instead of transforming as workforce and social structures change. Consequently, we have an industrial-designed system of education attempting to educate people who live in a technological age, without any regards to student’s perceptions of that education.

And twenty years after Banathy’s published work, we find that not much has changed. Instead of redesigning the system, educators and administrators with the power to initiate change at the local, state, and federal levels have chosen reformation instead of transformation. Specific to the developmental writing classroom, this industrial ideology creates a system for justifying grammar drills, strict classroom rules (with the faint intent of acculturating the students into college-life), as well as the pedagogical creation of writing as a step-by-step process that students can become proficient at in one or two semesters. All the while the curriculum is centered on repetitiveness and assimilation instead of creativity and flexibility, or within the context of the adult learner what Knowles sees as pedagogy instead of andragogy (“Adult” 206).

The industrial system of education creates a learning environment in which the student is dependent on the teacher for all knowledge gained. And, as Knowles notes, this system of educational dependency is comfortable for most teachers because there is a clear understanding

of the roles and expectations of the student and teacher (206). Yet the developmental writing students are not the same. Not only have current students matured within a technological environment, but they are also adults who bring to the classroom valuable experiences and knowledge that enables them to provide information to educators and administrators if they would promote the practice of “engaging...a learner in the process of diagnosing his own needs for learning” (Knowles 209).

It is important to consider that when industrial ideology informs pedagogical practices in a technological environment, the disconnect is felt most by the people who have grown up in the cultural work force and who will soon be entering or reentering this work force. As Larry Hutchins emphasized,

The old design worked relatively well for the society it served; it brought schooling to millions of immigrants whose skills and conformity were needed to stoke the engines of the industrial society. Today’s society no longer requires such a work force. We need people who can think creatively and solve problems using information and technology. (qtd. in Banathy 15)

Thus the digital divide researched by writing scholars like Cynthia Selfe and Barbara Monroe is not exclusively a divide created through overt discriminatory practices or cultural traditions and beliefs; it is a divide continued in a system that was established in the industrial age, afraid of reimagining itself, entrenched within a pedagogy of dependence. And as the educational system lags, the students witness the disparity between what is taught and what they will be expected to do. Thus, the capital gained in the classroom is not easily exchanged in the workforce.

The reluctance of our current educational system to transform but rather to maintain a bandage-like mentality, one that allows only incremental changes based on the crisis *du jour*,

informs generations of educators that instead of transforming the educational system, we must just eliminate the “undesirable”; the undesirables are “polluting” an otherwise clean and successful system. And as Marguerite Helmers shows us, the undesirable has often been the students in entry-level college courses. From the beginning of scholarship on teaching and learning, the hero narrative of saving the students from themselves has played out over and over again. Since the late 1800’s, students have been presumed to lack the proper training and thus have been entering college for over a hundred years as “deficient” (see also Ritter, 2009). As our nation reformed education from the mission to create an educated nation to the need of education to civilize and assimilate the immigrant, educators focused on the deficits of students and how they could minimize these shortfalls. And, as Bruce Horner points out, basic writers have been historically looked at as beginners, as if they are approaching writing for the first time:

while Basic Writing discourse accepted the identification of basic writers as ‘outsiders,’ it characterized them as nonthreatening, apolitical, would-be immigrants. Specifically, it represented them as beginners and/or foreigners seeking and able to join the American mainstream. (Horner and Lu 15)

Citing Shaughnessy as the forerunner for the discourse of basic writers as beginners, Horner contends that such rhetoric secured a naturalizing discourse of the developmental writing students within a pioneering metaphor that persists today (Horner and Lu 19). They are seen as new, as territory undiscovered, as a people unconnected to the terrain of academia.

In her research on teacher narratives presented in the journal *College Composition and Communication*, Helmers found the persistent, if antiquated, idea that “the student is a passive entity upon whom pedagogy operates” (19). What the students think about their educational experiences isn’t important because students don’t know what is best for them, especially those

who test into developmental writing classes. The students' voices are silenced by the authoritative voice within the system that explains to them how they need to be supported, monitored, and micromanaged in order to best help them situate themselves for the rigorous academic demands of the academy. The developmental education student is deemed fragile, perceived by educators as not mature enough to succeed in college (Zientek, Schneider, and Onwuegbuzie 75).

Despite the years of cultural theory informing educational scholarship and the publishing of texts like Victor Villanueva's *Bootstraps*, most students are defined by their ability to write "correct" prose. The illness narrative leads people to believe that a student's inability to write is connected to physical and/or psychological issues that can and should be cured. However, the "correct" prose these deviant, lacking, psychologically disturbed students are supposed to produce is the same "correct" prose that Helmers and Howard Tinberg remind readers is highly subjective; people within the same departments can't even come to a definitive conclusion of what constitutes "correct" writing. As Tinberg remarks, writing and assessment of writing is heavily tied to the instructor and how the instructor perceives the students, the classroom, and her place within the institution (ix-x; 43). Yet we continue to define the students who enter developmental writing courses as "less than" because their writing does not mirror a mythical image of good writing. We construct them as other than a college student. We place them into classes that often keep them out of credit-bearing classes. We label them as developmental, lacking, when we could be seeing them through a lens of possibilities, one which considers Tinberg and Jean-Paul Nadeau's contention that "we do them an injustice if we construct these writers through deficit models only because these students' stories often reveal considerable resilience and a determination to succeed" (19).

All of this background becomes important when we think about the developmental writer (previously called the remedial or basic writer). Attempting to succeed in a system that has set them up for failure, the students are written about and treated as though they were children, unaware of the greater academic world and in need of much encouragement in order to succeed; thus, they need to develop or grow into college students. And those instructors who may not wholly buy into the current educational system attempt to help them succeed through *mimesis* – providing the “perfect” model for students to utilize—and *ethopoieia* – attempting to help the students replicate “academic” writing. As C. Jan Swearingen asserts, “Our classrooms teach the imitation of a highly qualified voice” even when the qualifications are no longer valid in the current environment (139). Such invalid imitation negates contemporary capital that can be exchanged on the current market for success in the developmental writing classroom and future classes in higher education. Thus, the students who just moved forward from a developmental writing course into a credit-bearing English class can find themselves unprepared for the type of writing required of them. As a result, they are left with the feeling that they just wasted a semester in a developmental writing class that was supposed to prepare them for the next level of writing.

Consider Mina Shaughnessy, who worked against the dominant discourse of the 1970’s that proclaimed the basic writer entering City University of New York as uneducable, a figure whose writing issues were “irremediable” (3). Her pioneering spirit led to research results that have guided some developmental writing programs for decades. Yet, despite her well-intended research, she too constructs the student within the constraints of deficiency. The entire premise of *Errors and Expectations* was that basic writers were novice writers who will make mistakes because of their newness to writing in the academy (5). She notes that her study is a hope to look

at students' problems with writing in a way "that does not ignore the linguistic sophistication of the students nor ... underestimate the complexity of the task they face" (Shaughnessy 13). Yet, as she delves into her research Shaughnessy frames her narrative in terms of what the students lack, and when she attempts to understand this lacking, she confirms no clear answer. While it is obvious the students are new to college level writing, writing about them in such a way negates her initial hope about prior knowledge and experience; thus ignoring their ability to write in forms other than the elusive academic process expected by a nonexistent standard of college-level writing and continuing the distancing of the student from being a "real" college student. According to Bruce Horner and Min-Zhan Lu, Shaughnessy's frontier model for her approach to basic writers attempted to establish legitimacy to the work of educators who taught the basic writing courses and the success of students in the programs, yet her pioneering concept promoted the construction of the basic writer as foreign, different, the unknown, the other (32). And because Shaughnessy's work has informed generations of developmental writing educators, the views persisted by the basic writing or developmental instructors include the antiquated assumptions that education requires acculturation and accommodation; thus, "they all treat the students' fears of acculturation and the accompanying sense of contradiction and ambiguity as a deficit....and all signs of conflict and struggle as the enemy of Basic Writing instruction" (Horner and Lu 32).

Horner contends that basic writing students should be "recognized as capable of and interested in exploring options and exercising choices in their work and requiring respect for their maturity and responsibility as adults" (127). Thus, the classroom becomes a border space where meaning is created and knowledge is gained by the student and instructor in a shared learning space, a contact zone. Such border pedagogy promoted by the research and writings of

Gloria Anzaldúa, Mary Louis Pratt, Jay Robinson, and Patricia Stock provides a learning space in which the student gains agency in an educational system that has long denied the fact that the student shares responsibility in her education. Marcia Dickson emphasizes that “it only makes sense that to improve pedagogy, teachers and students must work with one another” (xiii). For Lu, border pedagogy allows for a learning environment in which the needs of the student are in the foreground and a space is provided for the student to make deliberate and well-informed choices that will help inform later decisions in a “more positive and constructive” manner (181). Thus, the student gains capital that empowers her to move forward in her studies and gains confidence in her ability to navigate within the academe.

Although basic writing and developmental pedagogy have been written about in some form for over 150 years, focusing on the students’ voices will bring a fresh perspective to the current atmosphere of uncertainty for developmental writing programs across the country. Current redesign efforts in beta testing in North Carolina show a genuine concern for transforming developmental writing in order to best assist the students in retention and persistence; however, these redesigns need to listen to those voices which have been historically silenced by a system that has deemed them from the beginning as lacking and undesirable on college campuses. This dissertation intends to provide a contact zone for students’ voices in an effort to legitimize their concerns in the struggle to persist and achieve academic excellence in higher education when that journey begins in developmental writing classes in order to emphasize to educators and administrators the importance of listening to our students.

Chapter Summaries

In order to assist in understanding how we have come to the current condition of developmental writing conception, this chapter provides background information about the history and progression of developmental writing classes and institutional perceptions of developmental writing classes in the United States. Within this historical framing is a discussion of the immediacy of the issue to assist understanding as to why developmental education as a whole, specifically developmental writing classes, is suddenly in the forefront of the political and higher education platforms. Further, this chapter has explored how maintaining an antiquated educational system that has historically placed students as passive entities in the educational process instead of as active agents who collaborate with teachers in the educational process provides a space for continued exclusive practices that place developmental writing students into the position of being other than “real” college students.

Chapter 2 begins an intervention in this history by discussing the methodology utilized during this research process. Specifically, the chapter shows the importance of a grounded theory approach to the dissertation project. Because discovering the students’ perceptions and assumptions about their experiences in developmental writing classes were of upmost importance, having the flexibility within the grounded theory framework allowed for a more meaningful exchange between the researcher and the participants. Open ended questions which led some participants to provide further context to developmental writing classroom situations and personal experiences provided information that assisted in the formation of categories for coding, reflection, and analysis.

Chapter 3 provides the broader context for this study by illustrating the state mandates of North Carolina in terms of developmental education and developmental writing, specifically.

Within this chapter, I share research to show what appears to me to be the reasoning behind the choice of the state to mandate placement testing at the community college. From this information, I situate the participants' two-year college and its approach to developmental education. Then, I center the conversation specifically on the state of North Carolina's policies about developmental writing in order to provide background information about both state policy and the participants' two-year college's actions within the policy. Overall, this information becomes important for assisting in a clearer understanding of the culture of the college the participants attend in terms of placement and developmental writing classes.

Chapter 4 provides a narrative to show the analysis of the data collected. Through axial coding, within the framework of grounded theory, several categories emerged from the participants. Participants discussed their assumptions and overall attitudes towards developmental writing classes. By listening to their voices, I was able to discern three distinct categories of perceptions that continually surfaced within the contexts of the focus groups and interviews. Within chapter 4, I bring to light the emerging categories in order to argue the need for students to be listened to as developmental writing curricula are designed and redesigned.

Chapter 5 discusses my final thoughts on the research in relation to the learned perceptions of value students discovered within the context of their developmental writing classrooms and as participants within the research study. Situated within cultural theory, I focus the issues within developmental writing, as brought out by the participants, within the concepts of knowledge, power, imperialism, and hegemonic systems. Through this lens, I bring to light research from Norma González, Luis C. Moll, and Cathy Amanti who remark on the concept of *funds of knowledge* in that our students are still struggling within a system that privileges certain ways of knowing and learning. González et. al argue that by ignoring the multiplicity of

knowledge formation and the value of variant perceptions, the educational system was able to create a deficiency model that placed those who were not perceived as desirable college students because of their race, gender, and/or social economic status as lacking before they even entered the doors of the institution. Thus, the deficiency model created a perception that the students placed into the developmental writing class have nothing important to add to the conversation, that they don't know what they need, we just need to tell them what they need in order to become successful in higher education, and the first need is development of writing skills. However, students were not just taught writing skills. As Eric Margolis, Michael Soldattenko, Sandra Acker, and Marina Gair noted, because the students were perceived as being deficient in areas other than writing, the curriculum began adding on components, often hidden, to assist in the development of the whole person into what was deemed at the specific time period and location as *desirable*.

Even though many positive changes have occurred as we progress towards a better understanding of the pedagogical shifts necessary for students who are in need of assistance to improve their writing skills, we find that teaching students who are not deemed prepared for college level writing “is [still] the specialty of some of the leading figures in composition studies and, simultaneously, the province of teachers and students placed at the bottom of the academic institutional hierarchy” (Horner 3). Many strides have been taken to reconstruct developmental education, supposedly for the betterment of the students; even today these same sentiments of “embrace and disgrace” are felt. As one supervisor once told me just a few years ago, “You are much too good of a teacher to be teaching developmental studies. We need to get you to the curriculum side,” her comment linking the perceived deficiencies of the students with what appeared to her as an undesirable instructional placement that was below me. She did what

many often do in looking down on the instructors of developmental writing almost as much as educators and administrators have looked down upon the students who take developmental writing classes. We are deemed the other no matter what pedagogical label the institution gives us. We are remedial, basic, developmental, at-risk, underprepared students and educators working within a system in constant flux that has bought into the concept that we are less than while simultaneously searching for the next big fix as populations and demographics change because within “the myth of transience, no group of students needs as much writing instruction as the group that we currently serve” (Soliday 11). And these needy students who are perceived as being unable to achieve the certain educational benchmarks at a certain moment aren’t asked what they think. Because they lack the illusive concept of college level writing skills, the students’ voices have been deemed unimportant in the discussion about their educational needs. As educators, we must remember the words of Langston Hughes because just as the students learn from us, so should we learn from them.

The curriculum is deadly, a repetition of the skills-and-drills approach that these students have encountered for years, and without success.

~Mike Rose, 2009, *Why School?*

It only makes sense that to improve pedagogy, teachers and students must work with one another.

~Marcia Dickson, 1995, *It's Not Like That Here: Teaching Academic Writing and Reading to Novice Writers*

Chapter 2

Methods for Uncovering Student Perspectives

Introduction

My interest in student perceptions about developmental writing classes has developed over the years. When I first began teaching English at the high school level in 1996, I was given the classes that the other seasoned teachers did not want to teach. One of my preps was a remedial writing class designed to help students improve writing skills in order to help them pass the state mandated test. Students could not graduate if they did not pass all sections of the test. The most difficult section for some students was the writing section. Thus, each semester I had about 15 students, juniors and seniors, who had already attempted the state test at least once (some had already taken it twice) in order to graduate high school. While these classes were not two-year college level developmental writing classes, when I began teaching developmental writing classes at the two-year college, I began to see many similarities between the curriculum being taught at the two different levels of education, even though the institutions I had taught at were in two different states. I listened to the concerns of the students as they began to navigate the two-year college system that included mandatory placement testing to determine if students were to be placed into developmental writing classes or curriculum level composition classes their first semester.

I listened as students expressed dismay at “being in high school all over again.” Upset with learning what they perceived to be the exact same material, with nothing new or challenging. They readily expressed what Tinberg and Nadeau uncovered in their focus groups: “students were hoping college would offer an experience fundamentally different from that of

high school” (25). And in the back of my mind I thought, “If it didn’t work in high school, why do we think it will work with students here at the two-year college?”

Such a question then led me to wonder why I was given the particular text I was given to teach the developmental writing students. Who decided what they “needed” in order to become successful at the curriculum level? Would some of these students succeed if they bypassed ENG 095 and were given the opportunity to attempt ENG 111? Why aren’t students allowed to take a challenge test in writing classes like the math students?

I listened as students expressed frustration when they moved forward to curriculum level classes and were told by their instructors that they didn’t know how to write and needed to take a remedial writing class (mind you they had just completed one). I had one such student who developed her writing skills tremendously over the course of the semester I had her for developmental writing. The next semester, her schedule included ENG 111 and a curriculum level course within her major. The instructor within her major told her she had no idea how to write, while her ENG 111 teacher was praising her development of content and original ideas within her writing for the curriculum level writing class. And in the back of my mind, I wondered who decides what college level writing is? How does the perception of college level writing change according to a student’s major core classes in relation to what is being taught in developmental writing and curriculum level composition courses?

As I began to read the research about developmental writing classes, I became disappointed. Discussions had finally begun about redesigning developmental writing curriculum; however, the debate brought out more realities to me than expected. I had at first thought that the institution I was teaching at just had not come on board with the research when in reality the issues were not only at my institution but across the state. Here we were in the 21st

century debating the continuance of skill and drill curriculum in relation to whether or not reading and writing should be taught together in a classroom when years of research proved over and over again what Kutz and Roskelly emphasize in their 1991 text *An Unquiet Pedagogy*:

When people read, they are actively involved in creating meaning, in the same way they create meaning from all of life's experiences. So reading, like writing, should be seen as an inventive, constructive activity. In reading and writing texts, students gain control over their own process of learning. But reading and writing are more than just similar acts. They are symbiotic, to borrow a term from biology; that is, they mutually reinforce, enhance, and shape each other. Reading helps writers discover structures and forms and voices just as writing helps readers uncover meanings and strategies. And reading, like writing, depends on what readers bring to it, as well as what they find through it. (189)

As symbiotic entities weaving together to assist in critical development for students as they improve cognitive growth, the integration of reading and writing had been shunned from the developmental writing curriculum with separate classes for developmental reading and developmental writing. I was disappointed because it appeared as if no one in the field had stayed abreast of the research. It appeared to me as if over the years developmental writing educators had been throwing every type of assignment and curriculum strategy towards these students to see what would work with little if any regard to the research.

I was disappointed. Disappointed enough that when I was asked to present at a NADE conference in 2009 on the concept of integrating reading and writing into the developmental writing curriculum, I diverted a bit and centered the topic of my presentation on a familiar quote from King Solomon: "What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there

is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). My reference and presentation was an attempt to uncover that years of research has been overlooked or ignored. I wasn’t the hit of the conference, and I upset quite a few people (though I should note that the newer teachers who spoke with me after the presentation agreed with me). However, my thoughts have not changed. Reading through the 100+ years of published research on composition and 50+ years of published research on just developmental writing, I found that current practices were in direct contention with the published research. Such practices as the skill and drill system had been found faulty decades ago but remained an intricate part of the developmental writing curriculum. Educators charged with teaching developmental writing classes appeared to me to not read or take into consideration the multitude of published research. I sat through many meeting where people discussed “what to do next” with the students; people exchanged ideas that may or may not work based on previous teaching experience and teacher lore, but never in one of the meetings did anyone include ideas from published research. As I said before, I was quite disappointed.

Years of research and publishing appeared to be ignored as each two-year college interpreted what they perceived as the student need for writing development in order to help prepare students for their future writing in curriculum level classes. And throughout all of it, the published research and the individual interpretations and curriculum development, no one bothered to ask the student how or if the developmental curriculum created to “fix” them was effective. When they entered curriculum level classes, did they find skills or abilities they learned in the developmental writing classes helpful in future writing in curriculum level classes? Did they perceive that they had received a writing foundation that they could then build from in order to develop their writing more fully for their major core classes? Was developmental

writing a waste of their time and money? Why weren't educators and administrators working with students as they developed the curriculum?

The years of questioning, led me to very interesting conversations with students and faculty about developmental writing classes. So, when I began considering a research topic for my study, I found that the most beneficial research I could do would be a study to collect data in order to find out what the student perceptions are about developmental writing classes. By listening to their perceptions, I hoped to uncover information that would help educators and administrators better understand the needs of the students so that redesigns currently underway would be better informed.

I did have concerns that the participants would focus only on the negative aspects of the developmental writing classes or only on the positive; however, by including a varied method of data collection (focus groups, face-to-face interviews, and email interviews) I was able to collect a variety of information from multiple perspectives that provided not only information on what students perceive to be important skills for them to learn to assist them with future writing at the college level, but their perceptions uncovered a strength in personal identification as a college student and how these students attempted to negate the stigma associated with taking a developmental writing class. The participants provided a starkly different persona of themselves. As shown within the literature review and historical context of the developmental writing students and classes from chapter 1, traditionally students who take developmental writing are seen as deficient, as lacking, as not knowing what they need or how they need it, as fragile, as needy. The participants in this study, however, proved to be strong-willed, critical thinkers, who quickly separated themselves from the negative stigma of a developmental writing classroom and focused on finding value within the classroom. Some of what they say, though, is a

reinforcement of the stigmatizing: they say that they are not really developmental—that they are different from the class. These students in this study proved that the negative ways in which we have talked about them and written about them is wrong. Thus, they should have a say as to what they need from a developmental writing class.

Theoretical Framework

The study's merging methods of data collection and analysis situated within the concept of grounded theory was chosen in anticipation of grounding "a theory in reality" (Corbin and Strauss 6). I am defining grounded theory within this study according to Corbin and Strauss' 1990 stance in which they contend that grounded theory must include two important principles that are built into grounded theory from the philosophical and sociological concepts of Pragmatism and Symbolic Interaction (Corbin and Strauss 5). These two principles are 1) Constructing change into the method because "phenomena are not conceived of as static but as continually changing in response to evolving conditions" and 2) Rejecting "strict determinism" because "actors are seen as having, though not always utilizing, the means of controlling their destinies by their responses to conditions. They are able to make choices according to their perceptions, which are often accurate, about the options they encounter" (Corbin and Strauss 5). Because I focused on students' voices, it was important that the students share some control within the research. Grounded theory allows for such shared power. By defining grounded theory within these two principles that emerge from Pragmatism and Symbolic Interaction, when participant responses provided information beyond answering the initial question, a wealth of data was obtained that I had not considered when creating the questions. The participants' responses also generated in some instances extra questions to help clarify the responses and to help better contextualize how and why the students perceived the developmental writing courses

in the way in which they were describing the experience. Conducting the study within grounded theory, thus, allowed for the students to have shared control of the data collected. Although I controlled and recorded the data through set questions that guided the interviews and focus groups, by including time for participants to engage in extended responses and, in the case of the focus groups, discussions between participants that sometimes strayed from the original questions, I provided a space for the student to create distinctive narratives told from their perspective as they reflected on personal journeys through developmental writing classes, and such shared power provided a means for the students to have more control over how they represented themselves and their ideas as they uncovered how they discovered value within the developmental writing classroom.

My approach to grounded theory is enhanced by Krista Ratcliffe's notion of "rhetorical listening," a concept she developed as part of her work in rhetorics around critical race theory. Informed by Rhetorical Theory, my guiding research lens attempted to listen to the participants' perceptions and assumptions about developmental writing classes based within their experiences as students in the developmental writing classrooms. My theoretical concept of *listening* is situated within Ratcliffe's claim that "rhetorical listening recognizes the other as a *necessary* consideration in the making of meaning for the listener" (31). As such, the students' voices communicate a message often ignored by educators and administrators, a message that should be heard, should be listened to in order to create a better curriculum for the students taking developmental writing classes. Within Ratcliffe's theoretical framework, the students' voices should be listened to as they create meaning that may not be agreed upon by everyone but that if listened to "will guarantee that considerations of the ethical and the political will haunt

discussions of *understanding*” (31), thus developing cross-cultural communication between students and educators as developmental writing classes are being redesigned and implemented.

Further, while my analysis searched for comparative incidents in order to assist with the categorization of the findings as I searched for “significant attributes” the participants shared, my inquiry was guided by Kenneth Burke’s recognition that “two students, sitting side by side in a classroom where the principles of a specialized subject are being taught, can be expected to ‘identify’ the subject differently, so far as its place in a total context is concerned” (1329). Hence, insight into the participants’ varied identifications within the developmental writing classroom and contrasting perceptions of the experiences and knowledge gained assisted in discovery of the limitations of agency created within the developmental writing program. The contrasting insights provided by students assisted in a clearer understanding of how these limitations often created perceived impenetrable boundaries for some while at the same time serving as surmountable obstacles that have served to push others to continue no matter what. Within this form of analysis, I constantly reminded myself of the importance of my context, of whom I was working with, of why I was working with them, and of what I hoped to gain for the larger discussion through this research.

Moreover, inquiry into what Bourdieu perceives as the forms of habitus and capital acquired during their work in developmental writing classrooms assisted me in learning what the students perceived to be valuable knowledge gained that could be utilized in other ways as they attempted degree/certificate attainment. In a 2009 article, M. Kate Callahan and Donalda Chumney discuss their research, framed within Pierre Bourdieu’s educational theories about cultural capital and habitus, which attempted to discover what most positively influences student success in remedial writing classes. Callahan and Chumney contend that Bourdieu’s concept of

capital can extend beyond the social world to an educational field, which brings to the forefront how education creates power for an individual when considered with habitus. The author's established the developmental writing classroom as the educational field of study and discovered that the developmental writing classroom that provided opportunity for gaining cultural capital in conjunction with habitus saw more success for their remedial students. The structures within the educational field, like the classroom context and tutoring, interacted with habitus, creating power gains for the students.

Through my study, I extend Callahan and Chumney's findings beyond the two classrooms they researched and contextualize the knowledge about capital and habitus formed from the students' perspectives. I found that the power gains for the students in the study centered on the value they were able to uncover within the developmental writing class. This value was often in contention with the perceived frustration of being labeled and placed in a developmental writing class; however, students who were able to refocus their frustrations and hone their skill development and refinement, expressed a clearer understanding of the skills they were able to carry forward into their college level writing classes. It is important to note that the students often found the perceived positive relationship they developed with the instructor as capital gained as well. The students who perceived their instructors as valuable resources within the educational field began to form habits of meeting with the instructor during office hours and before and after class in order to improve their skill level. Many of the participants also noted extending the use of the instructor as a resource beyond the semester in which they had the instructor for the developmental writing class, with a few noting that they met with their former developmental writing instructor for help on writing in their curriculum level classes.

Guiding Questions

This study has been guided by the question: What are student perceptions of the value of course content and instruction practices in developmental writing classes at a rural two-year college in North Carolina?

In order to answer this question, I sought to answer the following sub-questions:

- What are student perceptions about the content of developmental writing courses that they have enrolled in and/or have completed?
- What are student perceptions about the instruction practices of developmental writing courses that they have enrolled in and/or have completed?
- What are student perceptions about how others (administration, faculty, and students, both those in developmental courses and those in credit courses) view them based on their location in developmental courses?
- What do students perceive the mission statements of developmental departments/divisions in community colleges as saying about them as students and about the content of the courses they are required to enroll in?
- What do students perceive the catalog content for developmental departments/divisions in community colleges as saying about them as students and about the content of the writing courses they are required to enroll in?
- What do students perceive syllabi for developmental writing courses in developmental departments/divisions in community colleges as saying about them as students and about the content of the course for which the syllabi is used?

These questions are important because they attempt to uncover students' perceptions of the developmental writing classroom, specifically whether or not the curriculum and instructor assisted in developing the students' skills in ways in which the students perceived as gaining currency to be exchanged in subsequent college-level writing assignments. The questions also attempt to uncover the campus culture at the participants' two-year college in regards to developmental writing students, specifically how the students perceive how the institution speaks and writes about them in order to understand how the students have navigated around or bought into the identities created for them at the two-year college. Most important, the questions attempted to uncover what value students discovered within the developmental writing classes, a value that would possibly assist in a better understanding of why some students who begin in developmental writing classes do persist in college. Answers to these questions centered on the perceptions of the students who are taking developmental writing classes will better inform educators and administrators who are charged with redesigning efforts for developmental writing courses. Through the students' voices these questions, and their answers, can discover a shared space for co-development of a curriculum that will better assist students in improving writing skills for the college-level classroom.

Methodology: Data Collection

The research included qualitative inquiry methodology framed within grounded theory. Qualitative inquiry has been utilized for the collection of raw data from the text of the syllabi, course catalogues, mission statements, interviews, and focus groups. Qualitative research seeks to describe and understand; grounded theory is a method used in qualitative research that assists in discovery of knowledge without a pre-established or outside framework. As Juliet Corbin and

Anselm Strauss have noted, “data for a grounded theory can come from various sources” (5). As the data was collected, the analysis began, thereby, informing the research and forcing continual reflection and flexibility throughout the project.

Since I wanted to study students who had participated in developmental writing classes at a two-year college, my sample group consisted of current and former students who had taken at least one developmental writing class at a two-year college. I placed advertisements at one two-year institution, one four-year institution, and at the local public library. The advertisements on the higher education campuses were placed on bulletin boards across the campuses, with special attention placed on the areas of campus where most students took college level composition classes. The flyers were also placed in several spots on the large community board in the local library. I emailed the advertisement to educators I know in several states with personal notes requesting assistance in discovering willing participants for the study. I also placed the advertisement through Facebook, a social networking site, in order to assist in soliciting participants. The flyer was uploaded as a photo onto my Facebook page with the privacy settings set to public. I included with the advertisement a short description of the project and a plea for assistance from anyone who read the post.

My focus was not on the student specifically but on the “incidents, events, and happenings” (Corbin and Strauss 8) that denoted student experiences to assist in uncovering perceptions about their developmental writing classes. Thus, student input was gathered using focus groups, a face-to-face interview, and email interview responses from current and former developmental writing students. These students consisted of the following types:

- 1) Students currently enrolled in developmental writing courses.

- 2) Students who completed developmental writing courses and are completing or have completed credit writing courses.

I initially wanted to include in the study students who began but didn't complete developmental writing courses and/or those who completed developmental writing courses, but did not complete or continue to credit writing courses; however, I found none who were willing to participate. No one from this category responded to my advertisements. I sent personal messages to a few students who I know fit this category and are “friends”¹ with me the social networking site, Facebook, but received no response back from any of them. I found this interesting but cannot make a generalized assumption as to why they did not want to participate. Students who do not continue their education at the college level cannot be easily categorized and labeled, for their reasoning for not returning varies. I did wonder if their lack of participation from the study was because the request came from an educator who knows them; thus my request highlighted their inability to continue in higher education. But, ultimately, I do not know for certain why.

The students in the two categories who participated share the experience of a developmental writing class. Two of the participants were former students of mine who have moved forward to four-year institutions. Though each person's experience is unique, constructing focus groups based on this shared experience has “important benefits in regard to the data gathered and the comfort of the individuals present” (Rodriguez et al. 403). In their study on culturally responsive focus groups, Rodriguez et al. found that focus groups participated in by people with similar characteristics, experiences, and identities allowed for more meaningful data collected, especially with people who are traditionally marginalized because the participants

¹ The term *friends* is being used here only in the sense of how it is described through the social networking site, Facebook. The persons I contacted through the social networking site are not friends in the sense of people I hang out with on a personal level. They are former students who requested to be my “friend” on the social networking site; thus, I had a way of contacting them and recruiting them through the social networking site.

were able to discover that others shared their problems and ideas (403). Thus, the focus groups included membership from the two categories of students. While dividing the groups into separate focus groups may sound like the better approach, including the two types of students who share the experience of taking a developmental writing class benefited the group because it provided a space for diverse perceptions. Ivana Acocella noted that “it is important to avoid excessively homogeneous groups in order to encourage the collection of different points of view” (1127). The one-on-one interview and email interview responses were created for persons who could not attend the focus groups yet wanted to participate. At the beginning of the study, I thought the one-on-one interviews would be helpful in specifically seeking students who fit within the category of not continuing with their studies since these students would be the more difficult to discover and may be more sensitive to the subject matter due to not continuing their studies at the two-year college. However, the students who did not continue became an elusive group. Despite my efforts, I was unable to find willing participants from this category of students.

In the end, the participants of the research ended up being a more homogeneous group than I anticipated. All of the participants were from the same rural North Carolina community college—the one where I teach. All of them had successfully completed or anticipated successfully completing their developmental writing classes. Some of them had already moved forward to 4-year institutions.

The material and data collected for the study consisted of the following:

1. Two focus groups. The focus groups had two participants in each which assessed students’ perceptions of and attitudes towards the content and instruction of developmental writing classes. The numbers of participants

within this range are deemed acceptable for focus groups because it provides the space for diverse opinions with the opportunity for each participant to share within the allotted time frame (see Morgan, 1996 and Rodriguez et al., 2011). During the focus groups, questions were asked by the moderator as well as the moderator sharing select samples of syllabi, course catalog descriptions, and mission statements to facilitate discussion that would help us better understand how the students perceive the ways in which the faculty and administration write about them in such documents. The focus groups consisted of open-ended questions that provided space for extended comments that participants found helpful or interesting in relation to the discussion (see Appendix B for the questions).

2. One face-to-face interview which assessed the student's perception and attitude towards the content and instruction of developmental writing classes. During the interview, questions were asked by the interviewer to facilitate discussion that would help us better understand how the student perceives the ways in which the developmental writing class affected the student's perception of self, the class, and the student's interest in continuing studies in higher education. The questions consisted of open-ended questions that provided a space for extended comments from the participant (see Appendix D for the questions).
3. Fifty-two email interview responses which assessed the student's perception and attitude towards the content and instruction of developmental writing classes. These responses were solicited and received from students who

wanted to participate in the study but could attend neither the focus groups nor a face-to-face interview. The same questions created for the one-on-one interview were sent to the participants who volunteered to be a part of the study.

4. Three developmental writing syllabi gathered from online educational institution resources of two-year colleges and instructors who voluntarily submitted syllabi to me. Two of the syllabi came from North Carolina institutions. By using the connections I have made as a developmental instructor, I solicited from instructors in other states. One syllabus from another state was included in the study. The majority of the syllabi collected came from two-year colleges in North Carolina; however, I included the syllabus from the other state in order to better understand where North Carolina is similar to or differs from other two-year state institutions. The syllabi assisted in situating the intent of the instructor for the classes offered to prepare students for college-level writing assignments. The three syllabi chosen were included within the focus group sessions in order to better understand student perceptions of the documents. Participants received copies of the syllabi and were given time to read the documents before the session continued. I then referred to certain parts of the document within my questioning.
5. Three course catalog descriptions found online from two-year colleges providing developmental writing courses. Two of the catalog descriptions came from two-year colleges in North Carolina. I also included one from

another state in order to better understand where North Carolina is similar to or differs from other two-year state institutions. The course catalogs provided a reference point for the length of educational time allotted to developmental writing classes, the requirements for placement within the classes, and number of developmental writing classes provided by the institution. The three course catalog descriptions chosen were included within the focus group sessions in order to better understand student perceptions of the documents. Participants received copies of the course catalog descriptions and were given time to read the documents before the session continued. I then referred to the documents within my questioning.

6. Three mission statements from developmental studies departments housed within two-year institutions. Two were from North Carolina. One was from a two-year college in another state. Mission statements collected from other states were compared with those from North Carolina in order to better understand where North Carolina is similar to or differs from other two-year state institutions. The mission statements assisted in situating the intent of the institutions in regards to serving the underprepared population. The three mission statements chosen were included within the focus group sessions in order to better understand student perceptions of the documents. Participants received copies of the mission statements and were given time to read the documents before the session continued. I then referred to the documents within my questioning.

Data collected through the focus groups and interview responses provided a wealth of information as well as multiple discoveries dependent upon the research lens used to analyze that information. It is important to note, however, that the results while valuable are limited because of the number of students who participated, the fact that they all came from the same community college in rural North Carolina, and the utilization of only three syllabi, mission statements, and course catalog descriptions.

Due to the possibility of divergent readings, I placed the transcripts of the focus groups, individual interview, and email interview responses in Appendixes C, E, and F, respectively, so that others may discover meaning from the students' voices. All identifying information has been removed from the transcripts, including names of faculty members and institutions included in responses, in order to ensure participant anonymity. Further, I made every attempt to leave the language style and sentence structure as represented by the student. In the case of the email interviews, the responses are exactly as they were sent to me, except for formatting in which I made the participants' answers bolded in order for the text to stand out from the interview questions.

Methodology: Analysis

Utilizing a color-coded axial coding system within the framework of grounded theory, I began to uncover repetitive phrases and concepts that pointed towards several possibilities for categories. I waited until all of the focus groups and interviews were completed, all data was collected, before coding in order to attempt not to encourage certain types of responses. To begin my analysis of the data, I started with the first focus group because this focus group had much more discussion than the second group. The participant engagement and willingness to share

information, even when not prompted or asked, led to an abundance of data collected about the participants' perceptions of their experiences in the developmental writing classes. The participants in the first focus group interacted well together; such interaction was not apparent in the second focus group. In the second focus group, I had a very difficult time getting the participants to interact and answer the questions beyond simple answers.

As commonalities emerged from the data of the first focus group, I began coding the repetitive phrases and ideas with color highlighters to keep track of concepts that appeared to connect. I then read back through the data of the first focus group and made comments next to the highlighted data, in which questions emerged and insight developed. I began rhetorically engaging with the data, writing down my questions, responses, and observations to the participants' ideas and concepts. Once I had exhausted annotation of the first focus group, I waited several days and then began reading through and analyzing the interview with my face-to-face interviewee. I wanted to have fresh eyes on the data as I began to analyze the interview because I wanted to be able to notice emerging perceptions from the interview that may not have been in the first focus group. Perceptions that linked with those already coded with the first focus group were given the same highlighting colors while new emerging ideas were then given a new color code.

After I completed the analysis of the face-to-face interview, I then returned to the data from the first focus group and reread to see if some of the emerging perceptions in the interview were also within the first focus group. I then moved forward with analyzing and coding the second focus group in the same manner as the first focus group and the interview. From the data analyzed and coded from the focus groups and the interview, I labeled the color-coded repetitive phrases and concepts then created a list of the emerging categories, marking notes next to the

listed categories to assist in contextualizing the concepts so that when I returned to the categories to write about them the quick reference would be an efficient way of remembering. I then used this list of categories as my guide for analyzing the email interviews. I found with the email interviews that most of the participants were not very forthcoming with information. They tended to answer the questions quickly and simply, with only a few elaborating a response. This result became most concerning for me when I began to analyze the email interviews because I had hoped that the email would provide a space in which participants would feel more comfortable expressing their ideas, especially since the participants had opted for the email interviews. My assumptions about the amount of text provided as data in answer to the email interview questions, however, was wrong. Because of the limitations of the data collected, I decided to reserve the emails for coding last, once I already had a good base for the analysis. It is important to note, however, that the email interviews did provide new subcategories within the coding. The email interviews were the main space in which the participants shared negative perceptions of the developmental writing classes. So including the data from the email interviews became an important part of the data collection and analysis for the discussion of the students' perceptions in chapter 4.

As the data was analyzed, I found that students often expressed ideas and concerns in the context of the developmental writing classroom about the following:

- The participants' perceptions of the content of the class being a refresher for skill refinement and improvement;
- The participants' perceptions of knowledge gained as they reflected on the overall experience and recognized certain skills that transferred into other courses beyond the developmental writing classroom;

- The participants' perceptions of the instructor having valuable influence over the participants' perceptions of skills, knowledge gained, and participant identification as a college student;
- The participants' perceptions of course content by readily identifying specific skills learned such as vocabulary, organization in writing, writing strategies, and grammar/punctuation as valuable information;
- The participants' perceptions of self that were often subtle but sometimes overtly expressed in terms of self-perceptions of skill strengths and weaknesses including those brought to the class and skill deficiencies;
- The participants' perceptions of placement in the class and exclusionary concepts of their own skills in relation to "others" in the class who were often deemed less than the participants;
- The participants' perceptions of placement in the class by the placement test, which was often spoken of negatively;
- The participants' perceptions of utilizing the instructor as a resource during the semester the participant took the class as well as semesters after completing the class;
- The participants' perceptions of grade valuing in which receiving a letter grade rather than a P/F was important to the participants sense of accomplishment;
- The participants' perceptions of the developmental writing class as a space for gaining confidence in order to feel as though the participant could continue in higher education;

- The participants' perceptions of feeling a part of the college community. Most of the participants attributed the feeling of belonging to the instructor as well as being able to take credit-bearing courses while completing developmental writing requirements;
- The participants' perceptions of course value overall in relation to other courses taken.

By listening to the students' perspectives and utilizing an axial coding system, I was able to discern three distinct categories of perceptions that continually surfaced within the contexts of the focus groups and interviews: 1) The participants were very concerned about communicating to me how they perceived themselves in the class and often marked this perception through personal comments about their skill levels in contrast to others within the class. Often these perceptions placed the participants' skill levels above everyone else in the class, seeing their needs as one of refreshment while the rest really needed the class. 2) The participants overwhelmingly showed discontent with the idea of being shut out of college level writing. The participants remarked negatively about the placement test while discussing the decisions they made in regard to accepting placement or choosing to retake the test. It is interesting to note that despite being upset with the placement test and their initial placement, most participants found the skills learned in the developmental writing class to have value in other classes. 3) The final category that emerged from the participants centered on the perceptions of value. Participants often spoke of the value the instructor added to the class. The instructor's influence was pivotal to how the participants perceived even the value of the knowledge attained during the developmental writing class. It was often remarked that the developmental writing class became a valuable space because of the participants' abilities to gain confidence in order to continue in

higher education. Within chapter 3 and 4, I bring to light the emerging categories in order to argue the need for students to be listened to as developmental writing curriculums are designed and redesigned.

Methodology: Limitations

Even though I would like to say that research participation was sought blindly, the nature of my research, my position as an educator at a two-year institution, and the political and social climate of developmental education in North Carolina, as well as the United States, constrained my ability in some cases. For example, although I recently moved to a faculty position within the English curriculum department, I still hold ties to the Developmental Studies department at my institution. Such ties include friendships and acquaintances made during three years as a faculty member for developmental English classes and as a presenter at conferences sponsored by the National Association of Developmental Educators (NADE), an organization that my institution and Developmental Studies department is deeply entrenched in professionally and politically. Thus, the selection of students who came from my host institution may appear to some to manipulate my results; however, I want to make it clear that my intent was not to show how wonderful or how horrible my institution's work with underprepared students is. My intent was to find the students' voices and perceptions which have been silenced within all of this discussion and policy building, and to determine if the students' perspectives might contribute something to the discussion that would help effect positive change.

Further limitations of my study included the homogenous group of students who participated. All of the students took developmental writing classes at the same rural North Carolina community college, more specifically the one I teach at; thus, my results are more

localized than what was initially intended. The participants had also either successfully completed or anticipated successfully completing their developmental writing classes.² This limitation proved to be a difficult one to contend with on a personal level since my research intended to uncover why some of the students who take developmental writing don't persist. However, the students' perceptions and experiences, though localized and more homogenous than intended, are valuable and will hopefully open the door for further research into the students' perceptions and experiences, research that would include a more generalizable participant pool.

Because the focus of the research was on the students' perceptions and experiences, the use of only three syllabi, mission statements, and course catalog descriptions also created some limitations. The intent of these documents was to show students the language used by educators and administrators about the developmental writing students to uncover whether or not the terms, phrases, and tone used were perceived as offensive by the participants. The limitation of only three of each further situates the study to be localized and specific, yet the results provide valuable information that could be the beginning point for a larger, generalizable study.

An inherent issue within my study rests in the possibility of over identifying with the participants. My research ideology is grounded in the idea that the silenced must be heard, that the ones being forced to live the policy should have voice within the policy discussion, that we cannot truly understand the person unless we listen, truly listen to her story. Thus, I adhere to Michael Salvo's reflection from Emmanuel Levinas that "one's ability to recognize the humanity of the other defines one's ethical self. Regard for the other is the central principle for dialogic ethics, requiring that one see one's self in the place of the other" (275). However, seeing "one's

² Contextualizing descriptions of the students who participated in the face-to-face interview and focus groups can be found in chapter 4.

self in the place of the other” created a delicate relationship between myself and the participants, especially considering my identification with students who begin their college studies underprepared. Yet, the research I conducted is important because it creates a space for the participants’ experiences and knowledge to be valued. Maintaining an objective yet fair perspective required constant reflectivity and flexibility within the course of the research. By valuing participant experiences, reflecting, and remaining flexible, I found students who wanted to be heard in order to create a better educational experience for future students who are placed in developmental writing classes.

Now I don't have to look crazy in the face when I'm sitting with other kids that understood because I started at the bottom and worked my way to the top.

~Community College Student, 2013

Chapter 3

State Mandates and Developmental Writing Courses

Introduction

Embedded within the discussion of perception of self in regards to developmental writing classes is the student concern over the placement test. Several participants in the study mentioned not preparing themselves for the test and attempting to decide to retake the test once they realized the impact the test had on the classes they could take. Similar to these remarks by the participants, when I question students informally about their placement in the developmental writing class I often hear the same – students were told, “You need to take this test before you can register,” and rather than checking it out and studying, they just walk in and take the test. Thus, students confronted with the test often do not prepare for the test because they initially do not realize its importance. Once they receive placement into a developmental writing class, the gravity of the situation hits them, and many often question the accuracy of the test results. Participants in this study often echoed the sentiment noted in Mike Rose’s *Lives on the Boundary*: “Students who were placed in the Remedial English would ask us to go look at their tests, hoping there had been a mistake,” yet some saw the test as a confirmation of what the students “had long suspected that their math or English needed improvement. Their placement in the remedial course confirmed their suspicions” (173). Thus, disbelief of placement turns one of two ways – acceptance or denial.

Once students become more aware of the situation in terms of course placement and how the placement affects time of completion of degree or ability to transfer, it’s time for them to decide. Do the students retest, hopefully after studying a bit, or accept the placement? At the participants’ institution, local prerequisites require completion of ENG 111 for many of their

college level classes, which means the students must test into ENG 111 and successfully complete it in order to move forward towards their degree or successfully complete the developmental writing courses, then take ENG 111. Hence the decision to retest or not can potentially affect how long it would take the students to complete their education goals, which makes the students' perceptions of placement an important aspect to consider within the research on developmental writing classes. This chapter explores state policies for developmental education and local implementation of these policies that impact student placement in developmental writing courses in order to situate the responses the participants provided in interviews and focus group discussions.

Discussion of State Policies and Mandatory Assessment

The state of North Carolina requires placement tests for developmental writing classes for all students who attend any of the system's community colleges unless the students meet specific SAT/ACT cut scores or, beginning Fall 2014, they have an overall high school GPA of 2.5 or better, or they transfer in college level English from another college. The state's policy is situated within the concept that mandatory testing actually helps students in the long run.

When placement is mandatory as a result of assessment, those students most in need of remediation are required to participate in it. When placement is voluntary, many of the students in greatest need of remediation "slip through the cracks." Mandatory placement, therefore, insures that larger numbers of weaker students participate in developmental programs. This makes the developmental program accountable for the performance of larger numbers of the weakest students, thus driving down cumulative GPA and retention rates.

Obviously, this is not an argument against mandatory assessment and placement. In fact, it strengthens the arguments favoring it. As Morante points out, "Testing should be mandatory because too many students, especially those who most need assistance, will avoid assessment whenever possible". (Boylan, Bliss, and Bonham 8).

Deborah Boroch, et al., in their book *Student Success in Community Colleges*, discuss the published research from Boylan, Bliss, and Bonham in 1997 which suggest that "colleges in states that require assessment and placement showed improved student retention and success levels when mandatory policies were enforced" (36) and later share the counter-argument that "mandatory placement just drives up the numbers of individuals who enroll in remediation without necessarily increasing their success" (38). Postulating both sides of the argument, Boroch, et al. conclude that mandatory placement is necessary; however, schools need to "combat the negative effects" by helping students better understand "why they are required to enroll in remedial coursework, and...do more to help students see the value of such course and programs" (38). The community college that the participants in this study attended embraces this argument. Students who take developmental courses at the participants' two-year college are allowed to concurrently enroll in curriculum level courses when possible so that they can better understand college expectations. Students in developmental courses are encouraged to be active members of the college community and participants in campus organizations and activities. And the students are highly encouraged to utilize student support services such as tutoring, TRiO programs, and male mentoring programs. Further, the developmental education students who achieve success beyond the developmental education classroom are nominated for an institution award for success and achievement at the college in curriculum classes. In many ways, the

participants' college attempts to help the students in the developmental writing classes find value within the courses and the campus community in order to engage the student fully in hope of helping the students persist and obtain their educational goals.

As students work within the framework of placement, some find ways to accept their placement and discover value within the classroom. The students within this study suggest that often value is connected not only to content but also to the teacher. Many of the participants found value within the developmental writing classes with instructors who encouraged cognitive development as well as student participation outside of the classroom within the campus environment. Even when students express discontent with the material covered during the course, most often they speak positively about the instructor and the limitations placed upon the instructor because of the materials imposed upon them by those in power. Thus, this chapter explores the perceptions of placement and value described by the participants who took developmental writing classes in order to provide evidence of how students within developmental writing classes often come to terms with their placement and find ways to discover value within the developmental writing classroom.

Discussion of State Policies about Developmental Writing Classes

All of the students in the study attended the same two-year college in North Carolina for their developmental writing courses. On average, the participants' two-year college enrolls about 12,000³ full and part-time curriculum level students each school year. The college identifies students taking developmental writing classes within the headcount of the curriculum level students because many of the students taking developmental writing courses are also taking

³ The statistical information represented for the participants' two-year college was gathered from the information the college publishes on their official website. Averages are based on the last three school years, from 2010-2013.

curriculum level classes. Of these students, 60% identify as female and 40% as male, with the majority of students, 76%, being 30 years old or younger. 57% of the student population resides in the same county; however, the student population commutes from at least 6 other neighboring counties. On average, 3% are out of state students, including approximately 120 students from countries other than the USA. The participants of the study did fit within most of these percentages in that I had slightly more females than males participate, most were younger than 30 with a few who were older than 30, a couple ESL students, and one student who self-identified as being from another state. The information I collected, however, did not discover from what geographic region the students resided in while attending the two-year college.

Currently, all students who enter a two-year college in North Carolina are required to take a placement test before beginning curriculum level classes. North Carolina has required the use of placement testing at the community colleges since 1994 in order “to place students into developmental courses” (NC State Board of Community Colleges 1). The State Board of Community Colleges is responsible for deciding the types of placement tests made available to the two-year colleges and the appropriate cut off for determination of proficiency levels for placement into developmental writing courses or ENG 111: Expository Writing. By 2006, two-year colleges in North Carolina were given the option of the ASSET, COMPASS, CPT, and/or Accuplacer (NC State Board of Community Colleges 1).

The participants’ two-year college utilizes Accuplacer⁴ to assess whether or not a student begins college in ENG 111: Expository Writing or developmental writing classes. While students have the option to take the paper and pencil ASSET test, the majority of students take the computerized Accuplacer. The test is administered in a computer lab with the students in a room

⁴ Placement testing information was gathered from the information from the Placement Testing Office published on the college’s official website. Accuplacer is a computerized placement test developed by The College Board.

together. Since the placement testing office allots for appointments as well as walk-ins, most of the students choose the day and time of their test. However, some students wait until the day of New Student Orientation to take the test. This choice becomes problematic because often the students have not sufficiently prepared themselves before taking the test. The comprehensive test that includes computer skills, math, and English, generally takes two hours to complete. The student is not timed and can take as long as needed for testing. If a student chooses, he/she may retake the placement test. The participants' college allows a student to complete the test two times within a three year period. Students are allowed to opt out of taking the test, but this choice means they must begin their college education at the lowest level of developmental classes offered at the institution. The only exceptions to the mandatory placement testing policy relies on a student's SAT or ACT scores. Hence, students who have taken the SAT and scored 500+ on the verbal or ACT and scored 20+ on the English and Reading portion of the test are placed directly into curriculum level classes such as writing courses like ENG 111: Expository Writing. In order to improve student chances of placing directly into curriculum level courses, the participants' two-year college provides several opportunities for students to practice and prepare for the placement test. In person and on their website, students are directed to sample questions and encouraged to take the test seriously.

It is important to note that at the time of this study, the participants' two-year college is one of several North Carolina community colleges who participated in the state directed pilot study of developmental English redesign. Thus, over the past three years, the cut-off for placement into developmental writing classes has been determined by the dean who oversees the developmental writing courses in an attempt to provide as accurate as possible proficiency level cut-offs to inform the new redesign policy. As a result, there have been numerous changes to the

cut-off scores over the past three years as the dean has been discovering when appropriate placement occurs with the new standards and outcomes redesigned by the state for developmental writing. With this in mind, the number of students placed into developmental writing classes at the participants' two-year college has changed dramatically over the last three years. In the 2010-2011 school year, about 1590 students enrolled in developmental writing classes. For the 2011-2012 school year, there was a notable decrease with student enrollment in developmental writing courses at about 1480. During the 2012-2013 school year, the year of the full roll out of the developmental English redesign, 2267 students enrolled in developmental writing courses, some completing the previous ENG signified developmental writing courses while new students entered the new DRE⁵ labeled courses for developmental writing.⁶ Table 1 shows the developmental writing courses offered⁷ at the participants' community college over the course of the 2010-2014 school years while Table 2 provides information to show how the community college structured the phase out of the old developmental classes.

⁵ DRE is an acronym for Developmental Reading and English and is a pre-curriculum college class in the state of North Carolina.

⁶ Overall curriculum level student enrollment fluctuated slightly during this time period. In 2010-2011, 1201 students; 2011-2012, 11773 students; 2012-2013, 12214 students.

⁷ Course offerings descriptions are provided from the North Carolina Community College Systems' Common Course Catalogue published online at their website.

Table 1 – Developmental Writing Course Offerings from 2010-2014.

<p>ENG 070: Basic Language Skills This course introduces the fundamentals of standard written English. Emphasis is placed on effective word choice, recognition of sentences and sentence parts, and basic usage. Upon completion, students should be able to generate sentences that clearly express ideas.</p>
<p>ENG 085: Reading and Writing Foundations This course uses whole language to develop proficiency in reading and writing for college. Emphasis is placed on applying analytical and critical reading skills to a variety of texts and on introducing the writing process. Upon completion, students should be able to recognize and use various patterns of text organization and compose effective paragraphs.</p> <p>ENG 085A: Reading and Writing Foundations Lab This laboratory provides the opportunity to practice the skills introduced in ENG 085. Emphasis is placed on practical skills for applying analytical and critical reading skills to a variety of texts and on the writing process. Upon completion, students should be able to apply those skills in the production of effective paragraphs.</p>
<p>ENG 095: Reading and Composition Strategies This course uses whole language to strengthen proficiency in reading and writing for college. Emphasis is placed on applying critical reading skills to narrative and expository texts and on using the writing process. Upon completion, students should be able to comprehend, analyze, and evaluate college texts and to compose essays in preparation for college writing.</p> <p>ENG 095A: Reading and Composition Strategies Lab This laboratory provides the opportunity to practice the skills introduced in ENG 095. Emphasis is placed on practical skills for applying critical reading skills to narrative and expository texts and on the writing process. Upon completion, students should be able to apply those skills in the production of effective essays in preparation for college writing.</p>
<p>DRE 096: Integrated Reading and Writing I This course is designed to develop proficiency in specific integrated and contextualized reading and writing skills and strategies. Topics include reading and writing processes, critical thinking strategies, and recognition and composition of well-developed, coherent, and unified texts; these topics are primarily taught at the introductory level using texts primarily in a Lexile (TM) range of 960 to 1115. Upon completion, students should be able to apply those skills toward understanding a variety of academic and career-related texts and composing effective paragraphs. Please note: (TM) stands for registered trademark.</p>
<p>DRE 097: Integrated Reading and Writing II This course is designed to develop proficiency in integrated and contextualized reading and writing skills and strategies. Topics include reading and writing processes, critical thinking strategies, and recognition and composition of well-developed, coherent, and unified texts; except where noted, these topics are taught at a reinforcement level using texts primarily in a Lexile (TM) range of 1070 to 1220. Upon completion, students should be able to demonstrate and apply those skills toward understanding a variety of complex academic and career texts and composing essays incorporating relevant, valid evidence. Please note: (TM) represents registered trademark.</p>
<p>DRE 098: Integrated Reading and Writing III This course is designed to develop proficiency in integrated and contextualized reading and writing skills and strategies. Topics include reading and writing processes, critical thinking strategies, and recognition and composition of well-developed, coherent, and unified texts; these topics are taught using texts primarily in the Lexile (TM) range of 1185 to 1385. Upon completion, students should be able to apply those skills toward understanding a variety of texts at the career and college ready level and toward composing a documented essay. Note: (TM) represents registered trademark.</p>

Table 2 – Transitioning from the Old Course Offerings to the Redesign: 2010-2014.

2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
ENG 070: Basic Language Skills	ENG 070: Basic Language Skills	ENG 070: Basic Language Skills	
ENG 085: Reading and Writing Foundations ENG 085 A: Lab	ENG 085: Reading and Writing Foundations ENG 085 A: Lab	ENG 085: Reading and Writing Foundations ENG 085 A: Lab	
ENG 095: Reading and Composition Strategies ENG 095A: Lab	ENG 095: Reading and Composition Strategies ENG 095A: Lab	ENG 095: Reading and Composition Strategies ENG 095A: Lab	
		DRE 096: Integrated Reading and Writing I	DRE 096: Integrated Reading and Writing I
		DRE 097: Integrated Reading and Writing II	DRE 097: Integrated Reading and Writing II
		DRE 098: Integrated Reading and Writing III	DRE 098: Integrated Reading and Writing III

Within the new developmental writing design is the inclusion of Lexile levels matched with each DRE class. Lexile measurements are reading levels created with a readability formula in order to better determine the reading complexity of a text. The use of the score is to match a texts difficulty level with a reader’s ability. The readability measure for a Lexile score “is based on the semantic and syntactic elements of a text” (*Lexile Framework*). Thus, the measure is formulated from sentence length and frequency of words. While MetaMetrics, the developer of the scientific measures for the Lexile levels, notes that determining a person’s reading level requires sources of other information about the individual such as special interests and experience, the Lexile level is the assessment measurement used to determine readability, thus what books are considered to be “appropriate” within the specified range for the reader (*Lexile Framework*). While utilizing a Lexile level for specific developmental writing classes may at first glance appear appropriate, research on Lexile scoring suggests the same admission of

MetaMetrics, that a Lexile range should not be the main determinant for chosen texts in a classroom:

... quantitative measures of text complexity (such as Lexile levels and other readability formulas), while profoundly comforting and easiest to determine, can be largely misleading—if only because our over-dependence on them blinds us to the more subtle qualitative measures. Quantitative measures encourage us to slap a number, letter, or grade level on a text and be done with it. Librarians and classroom teachers know intuitively that these labels do not work—hence our sensible resistance to "leveling" our libraries. Quantitative measures provide a starting place, but are hardly where we will end our work of determining the complexity of a text. (Nesi 20)

Librarians as well as classroom teachers from Kindergarten through secondary education recognize the complexities of determining reading levels and the dangers of placing reading level labels on texts, especially when the reading level is then connected to classroom work expectations:

For example, a text with a low Lexile level can easily become more complex if a student's prior knowledge of the topic is limited. That very same material becomes even more complex the more critically we ask a student to think about it. It is one thing to ask a child to read an article written at a Lexile level of 1000 just to comprehend it. It is rather a different task to expect that same student to read the article to draw a conclusion from it and support that conclusion with evidence from the reading. The task, in this case, has just made the text more complex. (Nesi 20)

According to The International Reading Association, “readers need reading experiences with a range of text difficulties and lengths if they are to develop...as readers” (*Literacy Implementation* 1). It is important for educators and administrators to understand the complexities of the reading formula being used in the description of the DRE classes and recognize that a text’s difficulty level increases as students are asked to perform tasks with these students. So a student taking DRE 096, who will be reading texts “primarily in a Lexile (TM) range of 1070 to 1220, may or may not be able to develop his or her reading and writing skills to the level assumed needed to succeed at the college level because activities and exercises completed using the text may make it more difficult for the student to navigate, thus more tension and feelings of inadequacy, or may make the text appear too easy, thus more frustration as the student perceives misplacement in the class.

ENG 070: Basic Language Skills met for 2 class hours and 2 lab hours; students received 3 nontransferable credits. ENG 085: Reading and Writing Foundations and ENG 095: Reading and Composition Strategies met for 5 class hours; students earned 5 nontransferable credits. ENG 085 and ENG 095 had a corresponding lab which met for an additional 2 lab hours; students received 1 nontransferable credit for the lab time. Students who tested into ENG 085 were required to take the lab. Students who tested into ENG 095 were provided the choice for the corresponding lab. Any students who moved up from ENG 085 to ENG 095 and received a C or below were required to take the ENG 095 lab. Per the North Carolina Community College System, ENG 070, ENG 085, and ENG 095 are all slated to be obsolete at all community colleges by summer 2014. Being a redesign pilot school, the participants’ community college phased the old developmental writing classes out beginning with the 2013-2014 school year. The new developmental writing classes meet 2.5 class hours and 1 lab hour; students earn 3

nontransferable credits. Nontransferable credits are college credits earned that will appear on the student's transcript and the grade for the class factors into the overall GPA; however, the credits do not transfer if the student decides to attend another college. If the student transfers to another community college within the state, he or she will be allowed to move forward to the next developmental writing class within the series, with no requirement for the student to retake the placement test unless the student chooses. If the student transfers to a four-year university, the credits earned for the class do not transfer, no matter the grade earned; however, the grade earned does factor into the overall GPA that is assessed by the university in determining acceptance and placement within the desired four-year major. The lab component of the developmental writing classes consists of students in a computer lab completing a computer component. The writing lab computer program provides the students with questions about grammar, punctuation, the writing process, organization, and coherency. The lab instructor is available when students have questions. Students are also supposed to be able to go to the lab instructor for assistance with essays they are writing for their face-to-face component. Often, the lab instructor and class instructor are not the same teachers, which can complicate the process if their teaching philosophies and pedagogical methods do not complement one another.

The population of students taking developmental English classes at the participants' two-year college varies: high school students who are dually enrolled, freshly graduated eighteen year olds, military veterans, people who took a few years break between high school and college, displaced workers, and people seeking a second career option, just to name a few. Within this highly diverse group of students, each has his or her own perceptions and assumptions about college, what it should look like, what activities should be available, and what knowledge should be gained in the classroom. Listening to these perceptions and assumptions can add valuable

information in order to assist educators and administrators as they develop and implement better ways of instructing students who need a refresher or skill development before entering curriculum level classes. Insights from those who provide the instruction and from those receiving the instruction provide a balanced view. Students are no longer passive entities to whom education is “done” but rather an active agent in the process whose perceptions and assumptions are worth listening to.

I'm going to go through as far as I can go until they say you can't do it. So I kept that mentality no matter how much the teacher said this class is hard I was like well I'm going to see how hard it is. And put everything I could into making at least a good grade in it. I constantly reminded myself of my grandfather's words: "Success means giving up fun for a little while in order to get what you want in the end."

~Community College Student, 2013

When I started in the developmental English class I could not write a "C" paper. I would cry and cry and stress myself out. By the end of this course, I wrote a "A" paper with confidence. When I took English 111, I was writing "A" papers every time.

~Community College Student, 2013

Chapter 4

Students' Responses: Discovering Value in Disappointment

Introduction

Helmets' findings of how students have been historically perceived and spoken about negatively by faculty and administration continues to frame the discussions among faculty and administrators. Yet if we listen to the students, we find that they understand quite more than we expected in regard to the perceptions others have about them, including those who are entrusted to educate them. Students who take developmental writing classes should never be looked at by educators as *passive entities* in an educational process in which instruction is "done" to them. Each enters the developmental writing class filled with expectations about themselves as writers and about what the class content will offer them. Some students perceive their placement negatively, especially those who self-identify as "good writers" before entering the developmental writing class; others welcome the developmental writing course as a refresher that assists in skill refining and development because of their perceived deficiencies based on the years between high school and college. No matter what self-identifying label they utter, the students who are placed into developmental writing enter the classroom with expectations and assumptions about the developmental writing classes and the value the classes will have for future college level work, assumptions and expectations that sometimes change during their time within the developmental writing classroom. As educators, we must listen to their voices that express the students' understandings of the kinds of ways in which they perceive and place value upon their developmental writing education. By listening to their perceptions, we find valuable information that can help educators and administrators better understand the needs of the students in terms of developmental writing classes in order to transform developmental writing

courses into spaces in which students gain what Pierre Bourdieu sees as valuable currency that can be exchanged later in curriculum level courses.

While attempts were made during my research to find students from a variety of two-year colleges and educational outcomes in order to provide a broad sample of perceptions from both students who have not continued their higher education goals and those who have, this study is limited to a specific group of students who took developmental writing courses at a particular two-year college. As noted in chapter 2, the various advertisements and searches for participants did not garner the variety of students and former students I had hoped for. Instead, the students' voices represented in this study are a homogenous group of students who have all completed developmental writing courses at the same two-year college and are now continuing their education in curriculum level classes. The majority of the participants are still working on their transfer core diplomas and/or associate degrees while two of the participants have received their associate degrees and have moved forward to universities.

In order to help readers follow the stories that the students who participated in the face-to-face interview and focus groups tell, I have assigned pseudonyms to them and provide the following contextualizing descriptions of them:

- Laura was a white female in her mid-forties who had finished her developmental writing course work before participating in a focus group. She was friendly and outgoing, and she was eager that I and the others know that she was a mom who had been out of school for 25 years. She had received a high school diploma, but her current enrollment at the two-year college was the first opportunity she had taken to further her formal education beyond high school. While her disclosures centered on her concern over how others

perceived her in college, she was diligent in reminding us that she was not stupid; her placement in developmental writing classes was because she had forgotten former lessons as a result of the time away from school.

- Jim was a black male in his late twenties who had finished his developmental writing course work before participating in a focus group. He was very talkative and eager to share his knowledge and understanding of the developmental writing classes. Jim joined the military directly after high school and completed his four years in the service. Once he was discharged, he enrolled at the two-year college. As a former active duty military person, he perceived his education from high school to the point in which he entered the two-year college as ongoing. He considers himself to be a life-long learner, often reminding us that he learned from several spaces throughout his life, including his home, the military, and the two-year college.
- Corban was a black male in his early twenties who had finished his developmental writing course work before participating in a face-to-face interview. He was shy and reclusive, willing to participate but often not willing to share his full thoughts and views. He began his college experience a few years after graduating high school. Beginning his adult life within the working world, he felt it important to share with me that he decided to attend college because he began to realize that his bosses were no smarter than he. The difference between him and them was that they had a degree and he

didn't. He was eager to remind me that his persistence in college came not from anything the institution had done but from the support of his grandparents, specifically his grandfather. He emphasized his perceptions of being a member of the working class in order to situate his perceptions about the developmental writing class and his persistence in college.

- Doug was a white male in his early twenties who had finished his developmental writing course work before participating in a focus group. Directly after graduating high school, Doug had begun his college experience at the two-year college and has since earned his associates degree and transferred to a four-year university. He was direct, yet often unwilling to provide extended explanations. He was eager to convey that his experience in the developmental writing courses were a direct consequence of the choices he made in relation to choosing to not retake the placement test.
- Cheryl was a white female in her late twenties who had finished her developmental writing course work before participating in a focus group. She was friendly and outgoing, and she was eager to share how her experience in the developmental writing class reshaped her choices of major in college. Cheryl had attempted college directly out of high school, but she did not initially complete. After 5 years in the work world, she decided to return to college to complete a degree. She has since earned her associates degree and transferred to a four-year university. She found it important to provide

extended detail as to how the developmental writing class and the instructor provided such a positive first semester experience at the two year college that she decided to become a developmental writing instructor after earning her appropriate degree.

This chapter provides information from the interviews and focus groups in order to provide a voice for the student. Through their voices, we are able to discover that the ways in which researchers, educators, and administrators have perceived the developmental writing students have not always been correct. They are not the lazy, nonanalytic, helpless, people we have created narratives about. Developmental writing students vary in age, race, gender, and socioeconomic class. Each comes to the classroom with expectations, experiences, and assumptions about who they are as learners and how the college perceives them. And while the sample is small, through their perceptions of their sense of self, their sense of value for the classroom, instructors, and education as a whole, we are able to better understand that what has been done to developmental writing students over the years, has not served the students' best interest in terms of persistence, completion, and goal attainment. In their words we find strong, critical thinkers who found value in the disappointing situation of being mandatorily placed into developmental writing. Perceptions discussed are a result of the interaction of the students' background and self-concept, as well as their concept of others, the course content, and the instructor of the course.

Perceptions of Placement

The student I interviewed face-to-face, Corban, discussed how he struggled with his placement in the developmental writing class. For Corban, his moment of acceptance came once

he actually began the developmental writing class. Corban commented on not truly understanding his skill level until he saw assignment requirements for the course. After being in the classroom, Corban decided that “yeah, maybe I really did need this developmental class.” Upon completion of the developmental writing courses and entering the curriculum level composition course, Corban’s perceptions of his placement in the previous developmental writing class were solidified. He remarked on how lost it appeared some students who tested straight into ENG 111 seemed to be. For Corban, people who see themselves as smart perceive the developmental classes as beneath them, as taking a step down. But Corban saw from his developmental writing class experience that he had a better grasp on college level writing expectations because he accepted his placement and did what he could to learn and succeed in college. Corban summed up his perceptions of his strengths and weaknesses well when he remarked that “at first you don’t want to accept the reality of the fact that you need to start from the bottom to get to where you need to be. I think that’s probably the hardest part about that.” Unlike the class mom, Laura, who in order to accept her placement from the test centered her perceptions on refreshing her memory, Corban’s acceptance of his placement intertwined with his perceptions of self which allowed for him to make the best of the mandatory testing and placement into developmental writing.

Within the second focus group, the two participants, Cheryl and Doug, had very strong perceptions of their academic strengths, enough that they repeatedly separated themselves from the others in their respective developmental writing classes with Cheryl noting that some “other people in the class were having difficulties with [course materials], so it was beneficial for the rest of the class, just not for me.” Both initially saw their placement in developmental writing classes as unbelievable. While Cheryl acknowledged the five year gap in education, she quickly

pointed out that the initial assignments and lectures in the class fueled her disbelief that she had been placed incorrectly. Doug, clearly labeling himself as fresh out of high school and thus knowledgeable enough to enter ENG 111, asserted that he had made an educated choice by not following the advice of his peers:

Everyone was telling me to retake the placement test because I had just gotten out of high school, and I guess they had placed into both developmental math and English classes and then retook the test and tested out of the developmental classes. But I chose not to do that and to just take the class. And it was worth it.

Their perceived academic strengths, which they perceived as separating them from others in the class, appears to provide them the ability to accept their placement from the mandatory test, and within the focus group they attempted to show more readily just how above the stigma of the developmental writing class they were when we discussed the sample syllabi, course descriptions, and mission statements. When discussing the #4 syllabus and its course description, both participants saw the short, one sentence course description as lacking for those who are rightfully placed into developmental writing courses. Doug emphasized that “there is a reason people are in the developmental class, and this doesn’t even cover any of it.” Thus, those who are correctly placed into the developmental writing class would be lost; the lack of information in the course description would create misunderstanding for others, but not for them. As Doug said, the #4 syllabus’ course description “is a college level description of a class, but this is a developmental writing class, and I think this is just too college level for the students.”

This affirmation of ability level and the distancing of their abilities with the others placed into the developmental writing classes continued as Cheryl reasserted her skill level by offering information that she tutored students in developmental writing classes, and “the students I

tutored wouldn't understand most of these words because they are too college level." Yet, both agreed that the value of the knowledge and skills obtained in the developmental writing class helped them in subsequent curriculum level writing classes. Thus, their ability to accept the placement and move past their feelings of perceived misplacement led them to gain knowledge and skills that they would use in other classes.

However, these perceptions of academic ability and how students navigate feelings of (mis)placement into developmental writing classes isn't always so positive. Four of the email interview participants defended their perceived academic ability as better than their placement in developmental writing classes. Such placement created a space in which one email interviewee expressed how the class makes "you feel below everyone else" on campus.

Another email interviewee emphasized that because of the perceived misplacement "it just slowed me down" from progressing towards her degree. She felt as if the class were nothing more than "reviewing what I had already learned in my previous high school English class." Thus, for this student being wrongfully placed led to a perceived separation from the others in her class. She did note the value of the content of the class for the other students in that the instructors approach to the class helped others do well, but not her because she already knew everything that was taught. For her, the placement in the developmental writing class and her perceived academic level created the thought that the developmental writing class was no more than "high school all over again." Accordingly, she perceived that her placement led to her not learning new knowledge or skills that would be transferred into ENG 111; thus she saw the class as a waste of her time and money.

Another email interviewee echoed this sentiment of perceived misplacement in much the same way. She saw the developmental writing class as "a big waste of time" that led to no new

skill development. She noted that the content of the class was “way under grade level” and below her own academic level. Her perception of being misplaced led to her feelings of being other than a college student while in the class. She felt distant from the other students, above them academically, and she saw the class as a place “for outsiders.” Throughout the email interview she reasserted her belief of being better than the others in the developmental writing class by emphasizing her lack of need for tutoring or other assistance while completing the assignments. It is important to note that this student has completed both developmental writing classes and curriculum level composition, yet still holds onto the negative perceptions of developmental writing classes. Neither time in college level classes performing writing beyond the developmental writing classroom nor reflection on skill transference like the other participants remarked on has altered her perception of being wrongfully placed into developmental writing courses.

A similar message resonated from another email interviewee who perceived his placement into developmental writing classes as wrong; thus he still carries with him the same negative perceptions of the knowledge and skills taught within the class. Because of his perceived academic level, he saw the class as “rudimentary” and the course material as “simplistic” and limiting. He emphasized later that the developmental writing class was “basic at best and I felt as though I was back in high school.” Overall, he felt distant and unwelcomed on campus while in the developmental writing classes. Despite this perceived torturous beginning in college, he has continued towards his degree, but the inspiration, like the gentleman I face-to-face interviewed, comes from outside of the college. His inspiration is fueled from being a part of a community in which his family and friends are constantly struggling to succeed. He perceives college degree attainment as a way to avoid such struggles.

Perceptions of Value

Overwhelming within the focus groups and email responses was the concept of seeing their placement within developmental writing classes as a good space for refreshing forgotten writing skills. Whether the student was fresh out of high school or had been out of school for some time, the students continually justified their placement into developmental writing classes as acceptable because it was “a good refresher for me.” Once they entered, whether they felt the placement was right or not, many found value in relearning forgotten grammar skills, organizational strategies, the writing process, and MLA format.

One email interviewee who perceived her placement within the writing class as “right for me,” described the value of refreshing her skills:

My developmental writing experience was a great experience. I learned so much in the class and was even able to improve some of the things that I already knew but just struggled with.

By accepting her placement and seeing the value of learning again what she had forgotten or struggled with before, she was then able to see how the skills she learned in the developmental writing class “helped me out in the long run when it came to me taking English 111 and 114 classes.” By utilizing the class as a space for skill improvement, she felt more confident going into the credit bearing English classes.

Another email respondent saw that there were “things from previous learning that I did not remember;” thus he felt satisfied with the developmental writing class as a space that helped him gain preparation “for my next writing classes.”

One student, who noted that she had to take the developmental writing course twice, saw “the improvement from when I started and when I finished my semester” and later stated that

“even though it may seem easy and make you feel you did it in elementary school it [is] always good to refresh your memory. Some of the stuff I was taught I never learned in school.”

Even one email participant who didn’t perceive his placement in a developmental writing class as “right for me” noted that “it did help me overall.” This same student remarked later that the content of the class assisted in his “understand[ing] of the smaller things and it also helped refresh my memory.”

The perception of value of the developmental writing class centered not only on the course content but also the instructor. Those participants who had access to instructors they perceived as qualified and who created a classroom community focused on supporting the needs of the various student skill levels understood how influential the developmental writing instructor is, even if they didn’t agree with their placement. Take for instance one of the angry email participants who called the class “rudimentary” and “simplistic,” he placed blame on the limitations of the course material and curriculum content not the instructor: “She was a great instructor but the material provided left her limited.” Similarly, an email participant who found the class to be “simple and basic” and felt “below everyone else” also discussed the value in being able to utilize the teacher as a resource “outside of class.” Thus, the instructor is perceived as an “important” element in the developmental writing class, someone who appears to be “more concerned with the students’ success” than curriculum level instructors. Students spoke about the developmental writing instructors as having the qualities of patience, being “highly professional,” someone who was “thorough” and could “break things down to help us learn well. [So that] by the end of the class we were asking less questions and were able to see the improvement in ourselves from the time we started till then.” The developmental writing instructor’s influence even reached out from the semester of placement. While several

participants noted taking time to meet with the instructor for assistance with the course work, from this student teacher interaction a rapport was established, making it possible, even several semesters after the developmental writing class, for students to return to the developmental writing instructors for advisement. The students in the study saw that the instructors were limited by what they were allowed to do in the course which suggests an awareness beyond how we typically think of developmental writing students.

Within the first focus group, both participants repeatedly remarked on how the instructors of their respective developmental writing classes created a space for them to perceive value in the course. Jim noted that the instructor recognized the varying learning styles of the students and “went above and beyond to make sure all her students understood and were accommodated within each of the learning styles.” Right after this comment, Laura shared agreement:

“Absolutely, my teacher did as well.” Jim further explained his perception of how valuable the instructor was in influencing perceptions of achievement by empathizing with the instructor’s struggle to help all the students become better writers by noting that developmental writing instructors

are working with a whole smorgasbord of students. Whether they have no experience, high experience, nontraditional student, or the student fresh out of high school, so it is a little bit harder for the teacher because they have to take time to make sure everyone is up to speed by teaching it [the developmental writing class] at a level where everyone can understand what is going on.

Within this same focus group, the participants created metaphors that continued to reinforce their perception of the teacher as valuable. Laura equated the instructor to “a mother hen,” someone who nurtures and guides her students towards success. Jim agreed with this metaphor, and

through perceived motherly guidance, he was able to fine tune the writing skills he already perceived as good, which assisted him in gaining knowledge and skills that he later transferred into other classes.

Further, instructors who provided components within the classroom that included “group work, critical thinking, how to read something, analyze it, and break it down” were seen most valuable because as Jim said, “It all carries with you to your other academics and your personal career.” Cheryl, from the second focus group, echoed this perception of the value of the developmental class when she noted that the developmental writing class “helped strengthen my ability in writing for higher up classes in the next semesters that I have taken and push me towards the level of English writing and reading that I needed.” By providing the variety of educational components, students saw the developmental writing course as what Jim described as a “foundation for what you need to be prepared for other writing.”

This perception of the developmental writing class as a foundational class coincided with the perception of the course being valuable because of its ability to help students gain confidence to be successful in college. The participants in the study quickly pointed out the teachers who, as one email interviewee noted, “never made me feel as if [I] was not going to make it.” Teachers who created a classroom in which the students “connected...and we would all help each other out.” Laura, who remarked that she is now an English major at a four year university, described how the developmental writing class helped her gain not only the necessary knowledge and skills but a new perspective on English classes overall due to the confidence gained through her success. Laura began to embrace her writing skills and knowledge and no longer “despise[ed] English.” Instead, she saw the possibility of continuing on to the graduate level. By creating a

foundation that provided skill development and gain of confidence in writing, the knowledge gained in the developmental writing class altered Laura's decision for her future:

Overall, the developmental course actually made me find my passion for what I want to do. I would love to work at the college level or in high school with this developmental level of English. It made me want to be an instructor of developmental English.

The course content and instructor influence intertwine as crucial components to how students perceive the value of the developmental writing class. Seen as a space to gain confidence, adapt to college life, and improve writing skills, the developmental classroom proved for most of the participants to be a positive starting point for their educational goals, even if they weren't too happy about their initial placement in the developmental writing class. In addition, while family and friends do influence decisions to continue in college, the participants overwhelmingly showed how influential the developmental writing class can be for a student's decision to persist. As one email respondent remarked about her overall satisfaction with the instruction of the developmental writing class: "If it weren't for them I wouldn't of completed college English." Throughout the discussions with the participants, I found an overwhelming awareness on the students' behalves of the complexities of the developmental writing classroom. They understood the competing dynamics of students, curriculum, and learning styles as they and the instructors attempted to help them gain the skills deemed necessary for success in future college level classes. Traditionally, researchers have talked about the developmental writing student as being limited in literacy or analytical skills; however, these students have shown real critical thinking skills. When provided a space in which their experiences and ideas are valued, the students' voices revealed their abilities to reflect, think in-depth about the experience, and

communicate effectively their perceptions about the developmental writing classes. These same critical thinking skills helped them navigate the mandatory testing and placement in the developmental writing classes, move beyond their frustration, and search out value within the developmental writing classrooms. These critical thinking skills helped them persist in their college education despite starting their college experience in developmental writing classes.

Perceptions of Self and Others

While we as educators and administrators have labeled and defined a group of people whom we deem *underprepared*, the students have been watching, listening, taking in the assumptions and stereotypes, but not always accepting these signifiers. We have created placement tests that many easily shrug off as inaccurately representing their knowledge and skill sets. We have created classes to improve the placement test determined marked deficiencies and required them to take developmental writing classes that they must pay for but not gain college transfer credit. And while our collegial noses were turned up at these at-risk, remedial, developmental, college wannabees, some of them amazed us, excelled beyond our expectations while others left, never to return. Why? Why do some excel and others drop out? Why do some see their placement as a blessing while others curse the powers that be who have evoked such a barrier to stand between them and their dreams? What perceptions of themselves, their classmates, their educational resources, and their connection to the college are necessary in order to push through what at first can appear to be insurmountable obstacles? If we ask them, they will speak. If we will listen, they will tell. This chapter explores the perceptions of self and others described by the participants who took developmental writing classes in order to provide evidence of how students within developmental writing classes often do not see themselves as

deficient or lacking but only in need of a refresher course to remind them of lessons once learned but forgotten.

When students make the decision to continue their education at a two-year college, they make this choice with specific perceptions of their own strengths and weaknesses, defining themselves according to society's labeling of who they are at that time. As one participant, Laura, continually reminded the focus group, she is "nontraditional, older" and feared the label of "outcast" because of her age, constantly reminding us she was older and frequently connecting her age with her lack of skills. For Laura, any lack of skill has more to do with her time away from schooling than with any inherent flaw in her thinking or natural abilities. Laura admitted to her perceptions being confronted when "two of the young ones" adopted her into their clique. However, even after acceptance into the younger crowd of learners, she perceived herself as an outsider, assuming the younger crowd saw her not as an equal, not as a fellow student, but as the "class mom." Laura readily accepted this new labeling as class mom, but did not put it in place of the others; she holds onto the old labels, the old perceptions, almost as a badge of honor, reminding Laura of her beginnings in college.

Later within the focus group, Laura returned to these perceptions when we were discussing the mission statements. One particular mission statement used the word *underprepared* to describe the students earmarked for the developmental writing classes. Upon reading this word in the mission statement, Laura became agitated and reminded us of her age and time out of high school in order to emphasize that she wasn't underprepared, unlearned, unskilled, or as she later qualified underprepared as "saying, 'You're stupid'." She just needed a refresher. For Laura, the placement in the class resulted from "You don't use it, you lose it." She didn't use academic writing skills in the 25 years between high school and college, so she just

needed to be reminded. Thus, the nontraditional label, though readily accepted as lacking, was later clearly defined as “lacking only because of forgetting,” so the ability to learn and do well in school had always been a part of Laura’s perception of self.

Likewise, her co-participant in the focus group, Jim, perceived his writing ability as only needing a “touch up” and saw his knowledge and skill level as far above the other students in his developmental writing class. Throughout the focus group discussion, Jim reminded us concretely twelve times that he was a “strong writer.” While in other instances Jim may not have come right out and said it, his perception of self as being a good writer showed within his examples and explanations. Jim used metaphors frequently to help describe his understanding of the developmental class, assignments, and instructor. Jim further affirmed his perception of ability by discussing his childhood and how his home interaction included academic discussions between him and his mother. One such discussion he shared centered on how she taught him the importance of learning what a word means: “My mom always encouraged me that if I didn’t know the word to find out what it means from the context clues and research it because once you know the word for yourself, no one can take that away from you.” Relying on this history with his mother as evidence of his upbringing in an academic conscious home, Jim’s continual affirmation of ability above those he shared a developmental writing classroom with appeared to be necessary for his self-identification as something more than they were, thus able to succeed and move forward towards his degree.

Jim readily admitted that “there is so much stigma when you say developmental class,” but he chose to look at the class as an opportunity to refine the skills he believes he already possessed in order to perform well in future college classes. Jim saw college as a place to not only fine tune his skills but to learn from others “taking in different viewpoints and ideologies

and concepts and experiences and putting them all together, no matter what your major is or walk of life, and putting them all together and making a finished product.” Jim assessed the value of the developmental writing class in terms of how it reinforced his already developed skills for he had “a strong history of writing skills and love[s] to read; the classes prepared me to be more readily accepting of the papers I now have to write.”

Jim quickly perceived what the others in his class needed and made sure throughout the focus group to describe the gap between his own academic strengths and those academic weaknesses of others in his class. Jim illustrated their time in the developmental writing class as intimidating because “when they read something they aren’t familiar with.... For the average person it can be intimidating and scary.” He perceived his role within the classroom as that of mentor. When students stumbled, Jim would help lift them up: “I would have my peers ask me in whispers, ‘What does this mean?’ I would tell them.” His peers’ whispers for answers assisted in furthering his perception of being above them, of being academically superior, and therefore different from those who were placed because they truly needed the skill development. When Jim discussed the skill deficiency of the others in the classroom, he even moved from using first person to second or third person, linguistically separating himself from those whom he saw as needing developmental writing classes.

Remember when Doug thought that syllabus #4 was too “college level” in its description of the developmental writing class? He went on to say that while that is true, “I can read it, and it’s okay [for me].” Here, Doug demonstrates that his sense of self differed from the sense of the other students: sure, some students can read and should be in developmental writing courses, but he could. Much like Jim’s perceptions, Doug appears to be communicating that despite the fact that he may have gotten a good deal from the course, he didn’t need it as badly as others. This

sense of self seems to happen a lot in the students I interviewed; they seem to have developed a perception of self that provided important defensive strategies against the world of developmental education.

Moreover, Jim never took ownership of his own deficiencies in writing, for in his mind he had none; Jim saw fine tuning as somehow different from skill development, at least to the degree to which his peers needed to improve. As we reviewed the syllabi, Jim made certain to reassert his perception of skills by providing personal background information in that his skill level and ability to review the syllabi and have something of value to say was because of his past employment as an employee trainer, “com[ing] from the business world.” So where Jim’s co-participant willingly discussed how the 25 years had provided what Laura perceived to be little skill development for academic writing, Jim continually affirmed his academic writing ability by discussing how his previous work history had kept his writing skills sharp.

While perceiving his role within the developmental writing classroom as that of different from the others, as above them, Jim was quick to come to his fellow classmates’ defense as we discussed the syllabi, course catalog descriptions, and mission statements. When reviewing mission statement #1, Laura exclaimed, “I have mission statement #1, and wow. This is not meant for a student....A student would get offended.” For Laura, the document created to describe how and what developmental studies programs do for students used what she perceived as offensive language: ““The developmental studies program will be both a support and ladder for underprepared students’ that’s a slash to that person who is already thinking you know I’m in developmental; I’m stupid.” From hearing Laura’s reading of the sentence aloud, Jim’s exasperated response: “Underprepared. Wow.” Jim doesn’t elaborate at this moment and waits until the review of mission statement #4 to expound:

Mission statement #4 uses the term ‘holistic,’ which is positive, but they use the word ‘underprepared.’ Holistic sounds more student friendly and then you go and say underprepared. I think, “Well, you sound great, we are going to be working together; now I’m a dummy.”

As the discussion continues, Jim returns to the negativity of the word *underprepared* by reaffirming his experience and skill level and adding in his understanding of even his mom’s placement in developmental writing classes:

In my case, I was in the working world; I was in the military, so it [developmental writing classes] helped me sharpen my skills. So, everybody’s scenario is different as to why they need the developmental writing class. Like my mom is an alumni of a community college, and she wasn’t underprepared; she was actually over prepared, but she needed to get the backing to get into the market again. So, saying ‘underprepared’ just has a negative connotation to it.

Jim is uncompromising about the use of the word *underprepared*, enough that he comes back to it later. When reviewing mission statement #3, Jim remarks on the parts of the mission statement that make it more believable and friendly to students. He discusses how mission statement #3 creates a positive tone and uses words like “learner.” Towards the end of the discussion, Jim returns to his negative feelings about mission statement #4 by saying, “And they don’t use the word ‘underprepared.’ The student is called a ‘learner,’ ‘responsible learners.’ The other one [mission statement #4] was saying, ‘You’re stupid.’”

When the group finally reviewed and discussed mission statement #1, Jim’s indignation for himself and his peers increased. Jim first discussed the perceived confusion in mission statement #1 and how it left for a lot of questions, questions that even he as a “bright individual”

could not answer. Then when Jim read the part of the mission statement that says, “Developmental studies program has a commitment to assist students in their efforts to overcome barriers and enter the mainstream of higher education,” he can’t contain his frustration:

Now that right there offends me because it’s like they are saying that because I am in a developmental class I have a barrier, whether it be economic, racial, social, that is walking a fine line.

As we finished our overall discussion, Jim made sure to come back to the stigma placed on students who are positioned into developmental writing classes. Jim confirmed the perceptions of others as seeing “the lower developmental numbered classes as saying someone is not very intellectual.” But then redefined himself within that perception as still above, as someone who can speak for the other students in his class, as someone who knows the fear and intimidation felt by those who are placed within developmental writing courses, as someone who can speak for them.

In contrast to Jim’s perceptions of himself as being above the others in the developmental writing class with him, the participant I interviewed, Corban, discussed his struggle against the odds of college. Even though in the working world Corban saw himself as smarter than his boss, which spurred his desire to obtain a degree, he seemed to never truly see himself as overall successful in college, but instead looked at his success in increments that could easily be taken away. Each class, each teacher provided a new moment in which Corban had to decide if he were going to persevere, and Corban mentally prepared himself for those instructors who told him up front that the class was hard and that he probably wouldn’t succeed. In facing this barrier, Corban’s perception of self as an incremental fighter allowed for him to be able to say, “I’m going to go through as far as I can go until they say you can’t do it.” At the end of the interview,

I found that Corban's perception of self and how he dealt with the obstacles of developmental writing classes centered not on society, the college, or other students but on his family. Corban's ability to perceive himself as smart enough or good enough in order to have a better life than what he had before college rested in the memory of his grandfather who taught him that "Success means giving up fun for a little while in order to get what you want in the end."

Conclusion

Throughout this study, I continually found students who had taken developmental writing classes who formed identities in opposition to the mainstream perceptions created and forwarded by educators and administrators who design and implement the developmental writing curriculum. As Helmers found, we construct the student as lazy and verbally stunted while the instructor is the pedagogical hero (19). We often talk about the developmental writing students as if they come to us with no skills or few skills, while the students in this study saw themselves as having skills, just needing a refresher because they had forgotten. The three distinguishing tropes of writing about students, as lacking, deviant, beginners, over time has created a cultural literacy among educators, thus becoming accepted general truths about students who take developmental writing classes (Helmers 45-46). Yet, through the students' perceptions, the study uncovered a large gap between who the students think they are within the college context of developmental writing classes and who educators think the students are, a gap that often finds the students stigmatized and frustrated.

While institutionally being placed into the position of other than a college student, the developmental writing student continues to be written about by educators as if he or she is some mystical other that should be exoticized, dehumanized, pitied (Helmers 81), a student who is

looked upon as if he or she were a child in the stages of initial awareness and development, in need of encouragement (Helmert 70). However, the participants in this study proved to be highly knowledgeable, with assumptions and expectations about their abilities often so high that they even distanced themselves from other students in their classroom almost as if to separate themselves from the institutional stigma that has been mandated onto them. Moreover, even students who thought they needed or were getting something from the developmental writing classes found that the ways in which they were spoken about, written about, and labeled are problematic. The students listened to the rhetoric about them yet found value within the disappointment, found value in the mandatory placement, found value in the instructor as they persisted towards their educational goals.

But in thinking of the mechanisms of power, I am thinking rather of its capillary form of existence, the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies, and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives.

~Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 39

Writing extends the ways in which we use language to name and understand the world, to get things done in it, to communicate with others. It gives what we say and think a permanent form, allowing us both to return to what we have said or thought before (and to develop historical perspective) and to rethink or reform it.

~ Eleanor Kutz and Hephizibah Roskelly,
An Unquiet Pedagogy, 155

Chapter 5

Struggling to Listen

Power Struggles in Education

As the students in this study confirm, the multiple variables inherent within the construction of self and others of what it means to be a developmental writing student create situations in which students often confront choices of persistence. The current trend to focus research efforts on the “problems” with developmental education is centered on the issue of student persistence in higher education. As Aud et. al note, students who begin their college experience in developmental education classes are less likely to graduate than those who do not have to take developmental education classes (72). The research from organizations who are being listened to the most by state redesign teams such as Lumina, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Complete College America, and the U.S. Department of Education about developmental writing classes often focuses on what can ostensibly be controlled: teacher training, program improvement, student services; nevertheless, through my discussions with students, I have found that persistence seem to depend just as much on personal perceptions of self and others, influenced by a multiplicity of people, including family, friends, peers, and developmental writing instructors. How we define persistence and attrition, codifying it by a set number of years to create quantitative data, does not adequately reflect the real life variables that our students work through in order to make the best decisions for themselves and their families.

From a few of the students in this research project, we learn that even when obstacles come into play, and a student stops attending school, often in time, the student returns to higher education because the student has reached an understanding about self and society, a Foucaultian ideology without even knowing who Foucault is: If I want to succeed according to society’s

current construction of success, I must move from the outside to the inside, and college is an insider's space; if I persist, I will gain access, mobility, opportunity. Through this access into the discourse of higher education at the developmental writing level, students learn how they can become creators of new personal discourses, designed and reinforced by their selected institutions. As educators and administrators challenged with redesigning the developmental writing curriculum, we should take into consideration how the students perceive the developmental writing classroom. If we will listen, they will speak. If we will listen, we can create a new funding space for knowledge to be obtained, educational currency to be exchanged, a shared space in which we learn from the students just as they learn from us.

As the participating students in this study show, they are well aware that no matter what their cultural backgrounds are, they cannot succeed in college unless they conform to the accepted expectations placed into being by the dominate culture within higher education. For them, the culture within higher education labeled them as not college-level, requiring them to take non-credit bearing classes in hope to become the institutionally recognized college-level student. Such academic dominance derives from antiquated concepts of power and imperialism continued since the colonization of most of the known world by Europe (Ashcroft, et. al). In order to erase native histories and conquer the people and the land, how knowledge is obtained and who is allowed to receive the knowledge was decided by the dominating cultural power. Thus, who was considered to have the aptitude for education and who was not was determined according to native status, race, and class; aptitude for learning was only an ending determinate. The discursive frameworks for the educated were set in place, and anyone wanting to gain knowledge had to work within these frameworks or they were denied access.

In current concepts, we must acknowledge that in order to become a college student and maintain college student status, the person must work within and learn specific discursive frames. There is an imperialistic narrative that continues to define our history, including our educational history. Edward White terms this as the “new elitism” (McNenny and Fitzgerald 19). Despite the many years of educational theory and practice that continually informs us that our current elitist and hegemonic system fails our students, nothing changes. We may take note of how current trends in education are no different than 20 years ago because of educational policy that maintains a perimeter around education that only a select group can enter into; however, while administrators and educators make some changes that reflect the need for a student-centered educational system, the resulting factor that is seen today is the increasing need for developmental writing classes for the recent graduates and a continually recognized failing educational system. For all their efforts, the students are systematically labeled as developmental, as underprepared to enter the unchanging imperialistic higher educational system. And no one who has the power to make the needed changes will do it. They give us a pulpit (journal articles, presentations at conferences, and books published) to cry foul to make us think we can enact change, but everything continues on as business as usual in higher education. And the student who is labeled as developmental is left to navigate the minefield of obstacles.

Initiating Knowledge Sharing Spaces

As Norma González, Luis C. Moll, and Cathy Amanti, in their work on “funds of knowledge” point out, the privileging of certain ways of knowing or certain types of meaning intertwine with our perceptions of culture which have assisted in the creation of a narrative about certain students that have led to “the development of ‘cultural deficit’ models in schooling”

(González, et. al 34). As we saw in the earlier history of developmental writing, these cultural deficit models allowed for the formation of developmental writing classes that clearly earmarked specific groups of people who were finally gaining access into higher education as lacking the necessary skills to be successful. Much like Helmers' understanding of how attitudes and assumptions about students have been shaped and reinforced over the years through decisions made within the classroom and at the administrative levels, González, et. al underscore through their study how "poor and minoritized students were viewed with a lens of deficiencies, substandard in their socialization practices, language practices, and orientation toward scholastic achievement" (González, et. al 34). These lenses of deficiencies have informed educational practices for developmental writing pedagogical practices, curriculum structure, mission statements, and program redesign without listening to the students that these classes most directly affect. The deficiency models created a perception that the students placed into the developmental writing class have nothing important to add to the conversation, that they don't know what they need, we just need to tell them what they need in order to become successful in higher education, and the first need is development of writing skills.

Students in my study certainly recognize that college-level writing is more demanding; however, what those specific extra expectations are relies heavily on the college attended and the program of study. With this in mind, students attempt to gain knowledge about writing at the college level from their various personal and academic spaces which they have identified as sources for such important conceptual formation. Through their research on where students gain understanding that informs their perceptions, González, Moll, and Amanti discuss the concept of *funds of knowledge*. For González, et. al, "People are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge" (ix-x). Thus, the researchers emphasize the

importance of instructors recognizing the strengths of their students, what knowledge they possess, what experiences students have that can enrich the classroom instruction, and to “unlock and capitalize on the knowledge students already possess” (González, et. al x). By capitalizing on the knowledge students possess, instructors assist in the creation of cross-border relations, a space in which students perceive value because the instructor listens to their needs. Several of the participants in this study emphasized the value they perceived in their student-teacher relationship.

Accordingly, instructors can then create a mutual space within the developmental writing classroom in which students engage in knowledge sharing; as a result, instructors are better able to work with students according to the varying learning styles, build positive classroom environments in which students become independent learners, and provide a space for “the formation of localized funds of knowledge” (González, et. al 26) to assist students in moving forward with their educational goals: “The classroom can thus activate the funds of knowledge within a social network as it becomes a part of that social network” (González, et. al 26).

And just as social networks change, so do the ways in which knowledge is gained because “funds of knowledge are not only received from others, they are also modified, discarded, or produced, depending on specific circumstances” (González, et. al 26).

Contextually, we transform, create new forms of meaning, new ways of knowing, new ways of perceiving; however, often our antiquated educational system lags behind in redesigning or transforming in order to adequately serve its students. Old meanings and ways of discovering knowledge are privileged, while new kinds of knowledge creation are ignored.

Think most clearly of Banathy’s recognition that our industrially informed educational system is still fully intact, attempting, very poorly, to inform a technological society, which has

been around for decades. So it's not a lack of time to transform; it's a lack of understanding that old ways of learning are no longer relevant in a technological age, much the same way that old ways of perceiving developmental writing are no longer relevant. As Henry A. Giroux once said, "The ways in which student experience is produced, organized, and legitimated in schools has become an increasingly important theoretical consideration for understanding how schools function to produce and authorize particular forms of meaning" (qtd. in González, et. al 41). Thus, a transformation of how we perceive and interact with students who are required to take developmental writing classes needs to take place, and the only way for this transformation to happen is to add the students into the conversation. Listening to students' perceptions and experiences is critical.

Hidden Aspects of Developmental Writing Classes

By listening to the students' experiences from this study, we are better able to recognize where the invisible barriers to success in higher education remain; we are better able to understand the meanings and values we are privileging through our developmental writing curriculum; and we are better able to determine the types of capital and educational currency students leave the developmental writing classroom with as they move forward into curriculum level writing intensive classes.

Furthermore, whether students label it as theorists have, as *hidden curriculum*, listening to the students' voices uncovers the points in which the students have discovered the hidden expectations of higher education. Through their discussions of the hidden curriculum in higher education, Eric Margolis, Michael Soldattenko, Sandra Acker, and Marina Gair note that "some of the hidden curriculum may be in intentionally hidden in plain sight, precisely so that it will

remain undetected” (2); yet, not all goes undetected. In order to persist in higher education, a student must discover certain aspects of the hidden curriculum and then decide what to do with it. As Phillip Jackson (1968) emphasized, “These features of school life and requirements for conformity to institutional expectations had little to do with educational goals but were essential for satisfactory progression through school” (paraphrased in Margoli, et. al 5). For the participants in my study who were placed into developmental writing classes, these hidden aspects of the curriculum included privileging a specific type of writing process and language usage as well as placing value on being an active part of the college community and utilizing campus resources. And while the participants noted a deep understanding that to take a developmental writing course is socially perceived as negative, they are not necessarily aware of the curriculum piece hidden—the ways in which we have labeled and defined them.

The participants in this study entered higher education with funds of knowledge which provided a practical understanding of their personal strengths and weaknesses. So, unlike the emperor analogy Margoli, et. al use, students do not pretend they are something other, candidly admitting their need for a refresher, skill development, or fine tuning in writing. Thus, they easily defy the hidden curriculum that labels them as underprepared, “stupid,” a “dummy,” and work for success despite the limitations we have placed within the developmental writing curriculum. We may attempt to justify our actions, but our justifications are not acceptable by those whom our curriculum serves. They know their academic strengths and weaknesses because their funds of knowledge come from spaces other than the classroom. They know when a classroom space is mainly being used for acculturation and confidence building rather than a focus on writing skill development, and from their responses we find that those developmental writing classes that included both were spoken about in terms of being valuable to the student.

However, even though they were able to uncover certain aspects of the hidden curriculum, that does not mean that interview questions may not have led them to answer in a specific way they perceived as best, not necessarily honest? More specifically, I am thinking of the interview question that asked students whether or not they felt a part of the college community while taking developmental writing classes. All but a few participants were adamant in answering yes to this question. Has the hidden curriculum at the participants' two-year college created a situation that led the participating students to answer *yes* about whether or not they felt a part of the college because saying no would feel like an admission that they haven't fully become college students on the institution's campus, especially if we take into consideration how so many of the participants eagerly shared how their instructors motivated them to be a part of the campus community by attending events, becoming members of organizations, and utilizing campus resources?

By valuing the instructors' recommendations to participate in the college community, the participants gained aspects of a hidden curriculum in which students learn what Dorothy Smith called "the relations of ruling": elements of super structure, including the curricula of class consciousness, whiteness, patriarchy, heterosexuality, and of the West" (qtd. in Margoli, et. al 3). In order to be an insider, to obtain the educational goal set, a student often becomes an unknowing partner in the hegemonic proliferation of privileged discourses and ways of knowing. Even when a student is given voice, he or she is often ignored because pedagogical structures are limited and alterations from the design are frowned upon. And the students are confronted with the perception that only instructors and administrators know what's best for them. So the students must listen and obey, even when what the system is teaching directly conflicts with practical application of skills and knowledge within the world outside of higher education.

It is important to note that the hidden aspects fluctuate and transform, are localized, and are culturally based (Margoli, et. al 24). Thus, while the push for state standards weighs heavily on the curriculum redesign at two-year colleges in North Carolina for developmental writing classes, institutions localize curriculum, more notably the hidden aspects. For example, community colleges who value the ideas of Hunter R. Boylan, Director of the National Center for Developmental Education at Appalachian State University, include within their syllabi and mission statements a hidden aspect marked by Boylan's understanding of the difference between former remedial classes and the newer concept of developmental education which calls to attention that

students fail to do well in college for a variety of reasons, and only one of them is lack of academic preparedness. Factors such as personal autonomy, self-confidence, ability to deal with racism, study behaviors, or social competence have as much or more to do with grades, retention, and graduation than how well a student writes. (Boylan 1)

Thus, Boylan perceives the need to hide within a developmental writing curriculum personal and academic development, and "add support services such as assessment, counseling, learning centers and laboratories, or advising to their repertoire of interventions" (1). Hence, in order to be a developmental writing class within Boylan's conception, the developmental writing class must include hidden curriculum pieces that encourage students to feel a part of the campus community, something beyond the academics.

As the participants in the study pointed out, one of the most contentious hidden aspects to the developmental writing curriculum at their two-year institution was the privileging and valuing of the placement test. Few understood how a test, especially one that doesn't require a

student to write anything, could so acceptably determine whether they begin in developmental writing or ENG 111. Even students who later conceded that once they got into the developmental writing class they realized it would be helpful, showed contempt at being placed by a test. Yet, their eventual acceptance of placement does make me wonder if time has created the learning moments for the hidden curriculum that teaches them to accept placement, because the institution knows what's best for them, a lesson "embedded and naturalized, in other words, 'hidden'" (Margoli, et. al 23).

These embedded and naturalized lessons within the curriculum were the most prevalent when the students discussed the perceptions of receiving a Pass/Fail versus a "real grade." The participants have been conditioned through their K-12 experience and reinforced at their higher education institution that in order to prove success, that a letter grade must be assigned. As one student remarked, she needed to know if she just barely passed or not. For Donald Blumenfield-Jones, Associate Professor at Arizona State University, such thinking helps us better understand the hidden ideology within education and what grading exposes as hidden: "We think that we need to compare people to each other to give those who have better grades – meaning more cultural capital, more school capital – that translates into more material capital for them" (Margoli, et. al 25).

When some students are confronted with classes that conflict with this embedded ideology, it becomes problematic for them. Consider Laura, who accepted her placement in terms of how it affected her ability to have a 4.0 for the semester. Receiving a letter grade improved Laura's confidence about her ability to succeed to the point that Laura is now working on her four year degree in hopes of one day teaching developmental writing. The pass/fail system can become even more problematic when all other programs at the institution value grades. A

student must have a 2.0 in order to obtain an associate degree, a 2.5 to transfer to a local four year institution, and a 3.5 to apply to most of the health science programs on campus. Valuing grades for some students and not others leads us to question how institutions perhaps unintentionally, devalue developmental writing courses. This issue shows up frequently in the interviews and focus group discussions in my study.

Hidden Aspects of the Redesign

Within the state lead redesign piloted by the participants' institution, students no longer receive a letter grade for the class. Students now taking developmental writing courses receive a P or F, which is not calculated into their overall GPA. Often blamed for the attrition rates because it takes so long to complete the developmental writing courses, the class structure has also changed from offering three levels of developmental writing as 16 week courses each to offering three levels of developmental writing as 8 week courses. Students are encouraged to take the DRE courses in succession, and to set their course load up in a way that will have them take DRE 098 and a special 8 week ENG 111 section, taught by DRE instructors, in order to push them through more quickly to curriculum level classes. Many of the curriculum level classes at the participants' institution require a local prerequisite of ENG 111. The redesign inherently conflicts with the embedded and naturalized message the institution sends about the importance of grade point averages and taking the time to soak in information to reinforce learning strategies and/or teach other hidden curriculum material like personal development. A few participants who took developmental writing under this redesign did note that because of its quick pace, the students were taught to stay on top of their work. Yet, their remarks did not provide a clear understanding of whether or not their ability to keep up with the work was

because of learning to reflect and plan their studies effectively or if it were because of the intense, short-term burst of information that focused their attention for the compacted time period for the class.

Within the redesign is a new alignment of scoring for placement into the developmental writing class. In February of 2013, the State Board of Community Colleges agreed upon the new Multiple Measures for Placement. These new measures redefined how students are placed into developmental writing classes. A student who has an unweighted high school GPA equal to or greater than 2.6 will place directly into ENG 111; he or she is considered college ready (NC State Board of Community Colleges 2). At the moment, all other placement measures are still in place, including ACT/SAT scoring as a consideration for placement. Interesting to note as well, the new course description at the state level for the developmental writing class endorses the class as a refresher, skill reinforcement. While many of these new aspects may herald praise for making the students' higher education goals more attainable, thus improving persistence, the changes still send a message that developmental writing classes are a necessary evil that we just have to put up with the best we can.

Redesigning with the Student and Research

Through this study, a cross-cultural interaction that assisted in a student/teacher dialogical exchange, the students have provided valuable information in terms of what could be considered during the redesign of a developmental writing curriculum. With the students' voices here as co-developers, and based on the extensive review of research, I have sketched out a vision for developmental writing.

Removing the limitations of access to curriculum level classes.

As the participants noted, mandatory placement brought them into a developmental writing classroom already on the defensive. Thus, the placement test would no longer be mandatory at two-year colleges. Students would have the option to take the test if they are unsure if they are ready for the first-year writing course. A directed self-placement program as discussed by Daniel Royer and Roger Gilles (1998) and Anne Ruggles Gere et. al (2010) would be in place so that if the students feel confident to enter first-year college level composition classes, they would be allowed to attempt the courses with an option to drop/add to a different ENG course within the first two weeks of class if they, once in the class, decide they need a refresher course before continuing in the first-year writing course.

Directed self-placement uses information received from a set student assessment, such as a writing sample, along with personal information from the student to help advise the student as to the best beginning for his/her writing classes in college. The student works with an advisor who goes over the writing sample and talks with the student about the writing expectations of the institution to help the student make an informed decision about his or her educational needs. If the student self-places into a college-level writing course and finds the decision was not in his or her best interest, the student is given the option to remove himself or herself from the class and choose a different option that may better assist the student in gaining the skills and abilities he or she needs to improve his or her writing for future college success.

Providing opportunity for a variety of writing courses

I hold true to the idea that reading and writing should be integrated within the class instruction, yet as the participants shared, the issue of writing mechanics, such as grammar, punctuation, spelling, and vocabulary improvement, do need to be addressed specifically as a curriculum unit. As such, I would propose the option of a class that focuses on these rudimentary skills while also improving the students' critical thinking and analytical skills through the integration of reading and writing. The class should NEVER have a skill and drill component. These mechanics can be taught and reinforced through writing instruction that includes both low-stakes and high-stakes writing assignments. However, students who want to only work on developing their writing skills in terms of content development, integration of research, and organization would have the option of a class that focuses mainly on these issues, within a reading and writing integrated program.

In conjunction with these two options for classes the students could choose for themselves, students would also have the opportunity to attend refresher workshops. These workshops would focus on a specific idea, concept, or skill and be available to any student on campus. In order to better understand what specific skills or abilities should be focused on in these refresher workshops, the college should talk with the students, just as this study did, those currently in developmental writing classes and those who have moved on to curriculum level writing classes, to best assess and create workshops that will provide the students with the instruction needed for the localized writing expectations. By giving the selection of a quick refresher workshop or a traditional semester long course, students would be able to take what they need, rather than sit through and become frustrated with instruction that is repetitive and below their needs.

Redesigning terminology and earned credit

The developmental writing class would be considered no longer as developmental, remedial, basic, or whatever other terminology that has historically been placed on it. The classes would be given the ENG designation like all other composition courses and would be an option alongside ENG 111: Writing and Inquiry and ENG 112: Writing and Research in the Disciplines.

Reflecting on the comments of the participants, specifically their overwhelming concern about not having earned college credit or a grade for the class, I would commandeer the old terminology of Expository Writing and create Expository Writing I and Expository Writing II. These classes would be the optional classes that students who do not feel confident about taking ENG 111 could then take before moving forward. The Expository Writing I and II would not have to be taken in succession. Students could choose whichever they needed and then move forward to ENG 111.

The Expository Writing I and II would count as general electives for the students. Thus, the classes would be considered curriculum level classes, which means that taking the courses would not only count toward their overall GPA's but would also count toward their degree attainment so that the students no longer perceive that either time or money has been wasted.

Assigning letter grades that count toward the overall GPA

Grades for the class would be on the institution's point scale and count towards the overall GPA for the student. As the participants in this study emphasized, earning a letter grade that counts towards the overall GPA provides students with a sense of accomplishment which helps build their confidence in order to persist. Thus, I would

remove the current P/F option, and students would receive a grade like all other college classes.

Valuing instructor knowledge and skill

I would develop a more fluid curriculum that provides opportunity for the instructor to create changes as needed for the specific group of students being taught. Kutz and Roskelley underscore the importance of a curriculum that trusts the instructor to teach: “A good curriculum establishes goals and guidelines, suggests lines of inquiry, implies a framework for the work of the class. But when curriculum is simply handed down to teachers and then handed out to students, when it’s seen only as units of time and of study, it becomes a hindrance to learning rather than a support for it” (287). Thus, instructors would be given options for curriculum instruction much like most other curriculum level classes. With this ability, instructors could better assess if the students were, as one participant said, bored out of their mind, and make changes to attempt to engage student. The state mandates specific outcomes and measures for all classes within the Combined Course Library. Intertwining these outcomes and measures coupled with department goals and guidelines, instructors would be given the academic freedom to choose reading and writing assignments that would best match the student population and the instructor’s interest. In this way, instructors would be able to assess each of their writing classes and determine the starting point for delivery of information for reaching the state-mandated outcomes and measures. Thus, the instructor and students would be more engaged in the overall process of writing development.

No longer would the instructor and students be limited by the currently required department syllabus and weekly assignment calendar. New instructors would be given an

option of a standard syllabus with the opportunity to develop the class once they become familiar and comfortable with required state outcomes and measures and localized department goals and guidelines.

Focusing on Critical Thinking

Any redesign I worked on would involve reviewing and replacing rubrics so that assessments focus more heavily on content than merely grammar and mechanics. It was disheartening to me to hear all of the remarks by students about grammar, mechanics, and MLA format. It was as if all they learned focused not on the creation of content or the synthesis of ideas, but on minor errors that can be revised in final stages. If we want students to value critical thinking and become better analytical thinkers, then we must shift the focus of grading. By shifting our focus towards content and development, we are telling the students that it is more important that they can develop a clear and well-thought out idea than knowing if a semi-colon or colon goes in a particular place; thus, students will spend more time developing their ideas than asking where a comma should go. Students whose mechanical issues create a situation in which the writing cannot be understood would be referred to one of the ENG classes that could assist them with improving this skill and/or a writing tutor.

Maintaining a space for developing the whole student

As the first class most students take at the institution, the writing classroom will continue to be a space in which students learn the hidden curriculum of the institution so that they can have every opportunity to become successful within higher education. For many of the participants, their first engagement in the college beyond the classroom

occurred because of the information provided to them by the instructor about the organizations and activities on campus. Further, the students who found value in the class spoke about the value in terms of the developmental writing classroom being the space in which they learned what it meant to be a college student, how the college worked, and what the culture of the college was like. Through these hidden lessons, students were able to gain knowledge that would help them persist towards their educational goals.

Redesigning with Research

In addition to what I learned from students, my review of the research suggests that successful developmental writing courses also share other components. So as part of my redesign, I would also do the following.

Removing the rigidity of process writing

No prescriptive processes for writing will be taught. It is important to help students develop their writing according to their individual learning styles because not every student can work within the barriers of a formal outline or five-paragraph essay, nor should they ever be expected to. We must begin to recognize and feel confident enough to teach students that writing varies. That it is as elusive as Tinberg and Sullivan have uncovered. That what passes for college-level writing in science is not the same in literature nor is it the same in criminal justice. The focus should be on content not number of sentences or paragraphs. We can provide suggestions for brainstorming and writing development so that the students can discover what options work best for them as they develop their writing skills; we can provide readings across the disciplines to help them discover the rhetorical nuances to each type of writing; however, we should never

tell an entire class that they must complete a formal outline before writing and that the writing produced should not vary from the outline. Nor should we make absolutes in a sense that the 5 paragraph essay is “the” way to correctly write. Such restrictions go against the very nature of what it means to write.

Reading across the disciplines and levels

Within the redesigned class, the instructor will provide a variety of readings from multiple disciplines in various levels of complexity that will be analyzed and critically thought through as students discuss and write about the concepts from the readings. As the discussions on Lexile scoring and its implications suggests, students are best served when they are provided with engaging texts from a variety of levels. Such diversity in readings would include academic journal articles from a variety of disciplines as well as traditional literary texts. Students would discover the rhetorical strategies utilized by the authors in order to better understand the complexities of writing for specific audiences within varying genres.

Assessing student and instructor perceptions on a regular basis

Yearly assessments of student and instructor perceptions of the writing courses coupled with institutional assessments of pass/fail records for the composition classes would be necessary to ensure that what a student is learning in the composition classes transfers into knowledge that can be used in other classes in which writing is required. It is important to note that all of the assessments would be important as we must continue to listen to the students as they express their perceptions of the writing classes and the types of writing they produce in non ENG signified classes.

Communicating across the disciplines about writing expectations

Faculty will attempt to communicate effectively with instructors in other curriculum level classes to better understand writing expectations beyond the ENG writing classroom. While Sullivan and Tinberg's books "What is 'College-Level' Writing?" volumes 1 and 2 assist in uncovering the complexities of pinpointing what exactly is meant when an instructor says a student either can or cannot write like a college student, institutions need to locally assess how instructors and students perceive college-level writing on their campuses.

Providing access to writing tutors

The institution will provide students with the option of working with a writing tutor in a writing center, someone who understands the complexities of college-level writing and the struggles students have as they attempt to develop their writing. Some of the participants in this study noted the importance of utilizing writing tutors and extra assistance from various others while taking the developmental writing classes. For a few, the opportunity for writing tutorial assisted them with not only help in their developmental writing classes but also in other classes that required intensive writing. Thus, availability of writing tutors is essential for student success in writing classes.

Conclusion

As the students shared their perceptions and experiences in their developmental writing classes at a rural two-year college in North Carolina, some tentative answers to the underlining questions within the study emerged.

The data collected uncovered that the majority of students in this study perceived the content of the developmental writing courses that they were enrolled in or have completed as valuable. More specifically, many of the students found that the skills and abilities served as a great refresher before entering into curriculum level writing courses. Many commented on learning organization, grammar, and paper formatting that they believe may have helped them in subsequent writing classes while a few admitted to keeping their developmental writing textbook to use as a reference source in later writing classes. Some who initially found the content of the course to be boring or repetitive of what they learned in high school shared that later lessons during the semester were meaningful and valuable with their gaining transferable skills that helped them succeed in their college-level composition courses.

The instructional practices of developmental writing courses also received overwhelming positive comments, especially for students who had instructors who appeared to be supportive and engaging. The instructors who made themselves accessible beyond the classroom and encouraged students to participate in events and activities on campus appeared to be seen as valuable for the students. The students perceived most of the instructors as being genuinely concerned for the students' success to the point that even participants who spoke negatively of the content of the course often remarked that such content for them was no reflection of the teacher, but of the rigid system set in place that the teacher must work within. Hence, the instructor's became the focus of many positive remarks by the participants in that the students found them to be valuable in providing instruction as well as guidance into the culture of the college community.

Student perceptions about how others (administration, faculty, and students, both those in developmental courses and those in credit courses) view them based on their location in

developmental course provided a more complex point of view. While most of the students felt a part of the college community and spoke about themselves in positive ways, they often separated themselves from the other students in their developmental writing classes. Such separation led to the perception that the culture of the community college the students attend have in subtle ways created this othering, and for the students in this study it appeared as if by separating themselves from the others in their classes they were reinforcing the stigma of the developmental writing student being something other than a “real” college student. So, while the students didn’t overtly share examples of being stigmatized, their responses to the questions uncovered the institutional perceptions and how these students have attempted to work within and move from out of these constructs.

When reviewing the mission statements, course catalog descriptions, and syllabi, the students perceived some issues in the language used to describe the students in developmental writing courses. It appears that because the students had already separated themselves from the others, when they remarked on the various documents they also spoke about it in terms of how the other students who are in developmental writing classes might feel about the documents, to the point that one participant said that he understood the intent of the document but didn’t think others in a developmental writing class would. The participants were offended by documents that used terms that they perceived to be demeaning in terms of intelligence, yet the one noted syllabus that appeared beyond the developmental writing scope was spoken about as being too college-level for students in developmental writing.

Through this study, I discovered the value students perceived of the developmental writing class. While some may have seen the value in terms of skill refreshment and refinement, others found the developmental writing classes to be valuable for helping students situate their

writing for the demands of college level writing while acculturating them to the institution. Despite this more positive perception of the developmental writing class, some students were concerned about the developmental writing class being more like a high school English class than what they imagined a class that would prepare them for college-level writing to be like. As such, a few of the students remained resistant to their placement in the developmental writing class and shared how they perceived the developmental writing class as being boring and a waste of their time. By listening to the students' perceptions, I found that the redesign of course content and instructional practices in developmental writing classes at two-year colleges would be well-served if the students' perceptions were listened to and utilized in a way that can better intertwine state and institutional needs with the needs of the students. This qualitative study of a single site develops a research heuristic that can be replicated in additional sites in order to better understand the complexities of developmental education as seen from the point of view of students.

Further, this study helped me understand better how instructors and administrators need to realize that our attitudes and assumptions about developmental writing students create opportunities for the gaining of educational capital or reinforce the barriers that often shut students out of higher education attainment. How we choose to see these students, how we allow our respective departments and institutions to speak about them, forms our attitudes and actions. I choose to see them as students, not developmental writing students, remedial, basic, nontraditional, at-risk, but as students with varying strengths and weaknesses, with varying learning styles and perspectives, with something of value to add to the class, as all students at all levels have shown themselves to be in the college classroom. As their first contact with the higher education classroom and curriculum, we shoulder a responsibility to the developmental

writing student, but a shared responsibility between instructor and student, that the students are ready to take on, if we would only listen. A curriculum should be exposed, reciprocal, and reflective. And the students' voices should be heard.

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letters



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office

4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682

600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834

Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284 · www.ecu.edu/irb

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: [Tabitha Miller](#)
CC: [William Banks](#)
Date: 5/9/2013
Re: [UMCIRB 13-001026](#)
The Students' Voices in Developmental Education

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 5/9/2013 to 5/8/2014. The research study is eligible for review under expedited categories #6 and #7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
Flyer History	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Focus Group Consent Form History	Consent Forms
Interview Consent Form History	Consent Forms
Letter History	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Questions History	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
The Students' Voices in Developmental Education History	Study Protocol or Grant Application

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
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4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284 · www.ecu.edu/irb

Notification of Continuing Review Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: [Tabitha Miller](#)
CC: [William Banks](#)
Date: 4/2/2014
Re: [CR00001896](#)
[UMCIRB 13-001026](#)
The Students' Voices in Developmental Education

The continuing review of your expedited study was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 4/2/2014 to 4/1/2015. This research study is eligible for review under expedited categories #6 and #7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

Document	Description
Flyer(0.01)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Focus Group Consent Form(0.02)	Consent Forms
Interview Consent Form(0.01)	Consent Forms
Letter(0.01)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Questions(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
The Students' Voices in Developmental Education(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

Appendix B: Focus Group Questions

1. What do you believe is the most valuable information you learned in your developmental writing class?
2. What do you believe is the most invaluable information you learned in your developmental writing class?
3. Tell me about your overall developmental writing experience.
4. Do you believe the developmental writing class was necessary for you to be successful in other college level classes?
5. Is there something you wish you would have been taught that you weren't taught in the developmental writing class?
6. Review the three syllabi.
 - a. Do the words and tone of the document make you feel as if the instructor's intentions are focused on your success?
7. Review the three course catalogue descriptions.
 - a. Do these descriptions adequately describe a developmental writing class?
8. Review the three mission statements.
 - a. Are the missions believable?
 - b. Are the missions obtainable in the types of developmental writing classrooms you have been in?
 - c. Are the mission statements accurate for your needs in a developmental writing classroom?
9. Are there any other comments or suggestions?

Appendix C: Focus Group Transcripts

Focus Group 1

Facilitator Question 1

What do you think is the most valuable information that you received in your developmental writing class or classes?

Laura

I started off with 095, and it helped because I had been out of school since 1988; it helped prepare me, bring me back up to speed because I had been out so long, it helped prepare me for English 111.

Facilitator Extended Question

Was there anything specific that you remember that you thought “I’m really glad I learned that”?

Laura

How to write papers. It’s been so long. So the overall process.

Jim

I’m going to say for myself, because I am a strong writer, just the restructuring, that overall writing process. I took one developmental writing class. I took 095 as well. When I was taking the class, I had just come out of the military, so it was a good refresher for me. Even though I am a really strong writer, it was a good refresher course for me because it helped to bring back to memory what I had learned just few years prior in high school. So being refreshed on the overall process was helpful. And my teacher was very good. She went above and beyond to make sure all her students understood and were accommodated within each of the learning styles.

Laura’s to Jim

Absolutely, my teacher did as well.

Facilitator Extended Question

So having a teacher who understood and focused on your learning styles and worked with you from where you were at was helpful?

Laura

I just want to add on to, going a little off the subject, but I believe that developmental English teachers have to do a little more than usual simply because they are working with a whole smorgasbord of students. Whether they have no experience, high experience, nontraditional student, or the student fresh out of high school, so it is a little bit harder for the teacher because they have to take time to make sure everyone is up to speed by teaching it at a level where everyone can understand what is going on.

Laura

Yes. We were all at so many different levels like you said. 25 years ago versus fresh out of high school students all in the same class. My teacher had her hands full, but she did an extremely good job. She was a lot like a mother hen in the beginning, with her flock, babying us, and she gradually pushed us so that eventually, by the end of the semester, we didn't fall. We could get out of the nest and be successful.

Facilitator Question 2

What do you believe is the most invaluable information that you learned in your developmental writing class or classes? Is there anything that made you think, "I could have done without that"?

Laura

No. No. Nothing that I can think of. Everything that we covered was important.

Jim

I would second that as well. Because a lot of the different components that we learned like group work, critical thinking, how to read something, analyze it and break it down, no matter what your major is, it all carries with you to your other academics and your personal career. So I would say the same thing.

Laura

We actually had to get up in front of the class for a presentation. It was short, but we had to give the presentation in front of the whole class.

Facilitator Extended Question

So you had a little taste of everything incorporated into the class?

Both Participants' Responses at the Same Time

Yes.

Facilitator Question 3

With the next question, you both have already responded partly to it. I want you to think about the overall experience. If you were to make a comment about what you felt about the overall experience of being in the developmental writing class, how would you describe it?

Jim

I think it is like a birthing process. You know how like when a mother is pregnant and then the baby is born. It is like a birthing process. And whether you are a strong writer, in-between writer, or beginning writer, it helps. It helps the strong writer to build on what they know. It helps the in-between writer get the experience. It helps the new writer become comfortable because of the feedback. So that is how I would best describe it to anybody. There is so much stigma when you say developmental class. But, I believe it is a class that gives you the foundation for what you need to be prepared for other writing. So I would say it is a foundation and a birthing process.

Laura

I would say, you know, when you go take the entranced test and you are placed into, you know we all know what verbs and nouns are, but when you actually have to sit down and write and make it coherent, it takes being trained. And I love writing papers now.

Facilitator Extended Question

(to participant two) And you came in liking to write. Do you still like to write?

Jim

Well, I've always been a good writer and like writing and still do. My college years helped me fine tune what I was doing. I believe even if you are good, you can always become better. You can fine tune what all you know, and I believe that what I learned was all excellent. It was great.

Laura

Yes. We did several writing styles. We wrote on readings from the book. We were turned loose in creative writing. We'd make up our own stories. And that was fun. That was fun. We had to write a creative story with a twist at the end. It was really good.

Jim

As I reflect, I also remember how great it was to work with my peers. We were grouped together, and it was like I have this knowledge, you have this knowledge, but if we put it together we can make this. And it's more rewarding for me that way. In conjunction with what the teacher is already doing, it is rewarding. You know no greater criticism other than yourself is as important as that from your peer. You know when you try to reason it out and think, "I don't know; this sounds different." I've written a paper and given it to someone else and they looked over it and said, "This isn't good," which is fine. I would rather someone read it and tell me what they really. If a peer reads it and tells me what I'm doing wrong, I listen because I am hopeful that they are giving me the right criticism.

Laura

I second that too because when we were put in groups, as one of the nontraditional older students with the fresh out of high school students and a twenty something student, we all had different experiences, and it really helped to share our opinions.

Jim

You know, that is what college is all about. Taking in different viewpoints and ideologies and concepts and experiences and putting them all together, no matter what your major is or walk of life, and putting them all together and making a finished product.

Laura

And that was one of my main concerns when I started school because I am a nontraditional student with a bunch of fresh out of high school students. I thought I would be the outcast. But it wasn't like that. I was welcomed in. Last semester, I was adopted by two of the young ones; they saw me as a class mom.

Facilitator Question 4

Do you believe the developmental writing class was necessary for you to be successful in other college level classes, not just writing classes, but all college level classes?

Laura

Absolutely. The critical thinking part, even back in high school, we were not taught that aspect of it. So absolutely, yes.

Jim

I have a different perspective. I would say yes and no for me personally. No because I already had those skills. But in a twist, yes because I had been out of school and in the working world and needed a refresher. So yes on a side for the refreshing experience, but no because I already knew how to do it; however, it is always good to sharpen up what you have and the class helped me refine my skills, and I like to keep the edges sharp. However, I find, because I took English 111 and English 113, that a lot of the different aspects of writing and research, and like argumentative, they all go hand in hand with the other classes I have now in my major that are reading and writing intensive courses. And they don't want any lackadaisical type work; they want topnotch quality work. I think the reinforcement from what I gained in all my English classes overall, including developmental classes, have prepared me, even though I already had a strong history of writing skills and love to read, the classes prepared me to be more readily accepting of the papers I now have to write. I can approach them more easily because the classes gave me the skills to just go ahead and it knock out of the ball park. So I would say for the personal part, sharpening and refreshing my skills, yes. But because I already had the skills, I could have already gotten by without the developmental writing course.

Facilitator Question 5

Is there something you wish you would have been taught that you weren't taught in the developmental writing class?

Laura

The use of contractions. We could not use contractions in English 111. Points were taken off of our papers if we used contractions in our writing. And I don't use them now in my writing. It has become a habit to not use them. But I didn't learn this until English 111. While my 095 class prepared me for English 111, I do wish I would have learned that in 095. Then my English 113 teacher was even harder on grading. But, yes, the use of contractions. I wish they would have nipped that in the bud in 095. Because I had no clue. It is a word for us.

Jim

This may sound a little elementary, but coming from my hometown and going to an art school in high school, I believe she is right in learning the contraction usage and also learning the different contexts for vocabulary words would be excellent because people would be using words, and they weren't using them in the right context for the meaning they were trying to convey. And I think you need to know what word you are using before you say it or write it. It's very important because we read stuff the first time just as a general

reading to understand the meaning; we then also have to read to analyze and criticize, but if you don't understand the meaning of the words in the reading you are really doing yourself an injustice. So, I would say vocabulary words. I really can't stress that enough. I know it sounds kind of elementary, but then again it is not. I think as you move up into the different courses there needs to be a vocabulary component involved conditioned upon the level of the English class.

Facilitator Extended Question

So you are talking about having a vocabulary list?

Jim

Not so much a list, but if you are reading something and say like your teacher assigns something and says, "Ok read this and if you find unfamiliar words, try to figure them out using context clues and then read it again and let's research these words." I think sometimes people get intimidated when they read something and aren't familiar with the words because they haven't been exposed to the words at all. For the average person it can be intimidating and scary. I would have my peers ask me in whispers, "What does this mean?" I would tell them, but it would also be helpful if they learned how to find out for themselves. You know, we perish for a lack of knowledge. We don't have knowledge. But knowledge is power. My mom always encouraged me that if I didn't know the word to find out what it means from the context clues and research it because once you know the word for yourself, no one can take that away from you.

Facilitator Question 6

For the next part, I have some syllabi that I would like you to review. Once you are done previewing them, I will ask you whether or not the words and the tone of the documents make you feel as if the instructors' intentions are focused on student success.

Syllabus #1:

Laura

I think it is a nice gesture that the students can email a paper if they aren't going to be in class, but I also think it's important that the student has their but in a chair to turn their paper in. I don't see this as an attempt for them to be successful but instead an excuse for them to not have to come to class but still get their work done. You enroll in college to go to college; you should be in class. Not sitting at home, turning your paper in, and then sleeping. I think if you aren't there to turn your paper in, you're done or at least have ten points taken off.

Jim

Syllabus #1 seems very personal, seems very involved. The instructor even includes on the schedule days of the week when she isn't going to be in town. They don't have to do that. A lot of professors are like, "That's my business." So including these days to me seems very personal. The last section reads like the instructor is talking directly to me. It reads like a journal or something. It just seems very personal. Even though it's just like an outline and policy and procedures, it just feels personal. It's a lot, but it's personal. I just get the feeling she is like a mothering type person. A nurturing instructor.

Syllabus #2:

Laura

When I was going through syllabus #2, I see there is an attendance policy; then on the next page, later, there is an additional attendance policy. So it seems unorganized. It needs to all be together. When I saw it I was taken back like, “Oh, and additional. Okay.” For a new student coming in, they would read it and say, “So what am I supposed to do? Is it all the same stuff or what?”

Jim

Syllabus #2 is good. Hmmmm. But when I read it, I get a very neutral feeling. It just feels like it's just business. It feels like a generic syllabus. Like there is no instructor personality to it. It's not bad; it's not good. It's just a syllabus. It is what it is. My opinion about syllabus comes from my experience working as an employee trainer, and I had to learn how to appeal to my trainees, even in my syllabi. This syllabus just reminds me of a syllabus that has just what is needed. It's clear. Just no personality.

Syllabus #3:

Jim

Syllabus 3 is kind of rigid. Rigid in the fact that the majority of it, the last few pages, is all policy. It's just cut and dry. On the second page, it is too wordy. It's confusing. It's overwhelming. The syllabus is just very heavy. I come from the business world and look at things from this aspect and the second page is just confusing when it talks about the outcomes and assessments. There is so much in just the first core learning objective that you will lose people, and they won't continue to read the syllabus. When you come into a developmental class, the syllabus should be simple and as direct as possible. This syllabus doesn't look like it was constructed for the student. This looks more like an English 111 syllabus.

I think sometimes professors who want respect and expect respect to be given, and I get it because you've earned the degree, you've earned that title, got it; but sometimes syllabi can come off cold and uncaring. Professors in a developmental class have to be careful about that because you are shaping a student's core foundation for college and you shouldn't be like, “Here's the syllabus, take it or leave it.” There's a statement in syllabus #3 where I get that impression from the instructor. It's the tone and heaviness. It says, “Writing 090 is graded P, pass, or no pass, NP.” When I took my developmental writing class I got a grade. So when I read this, I was like, “Whoa.” I understand that you have to pass, but it's just the tone of this. And if you read further, it says, “A student who does not pass this course must repeat...” which I understand of course it makes sense “...this class may be taught in a hybrid format.” Now, hold it. I thought that all, at least at our institution, all the developmental classes are taught in the classroom for the sake of having that one on one interaction with the instructor. Having your butt in the seat type thing; you know. So is this class taught in hybrid or is it the next class if you have to repeat the class? It's kind of confusing. It's confusing. It's confusing.

Laura's Extended Response to Jim

Well even if it was the next developmental class taught in hybrid, I still wouldn't want that in hybrid. I want to be in the classroom.

Jim's Extended Response to Laura

Yes. And then these charts are good. I think they need to be broken down a little more. This person does a good job with that. It's just the tone of the overall document.

As a student, I think it is important that instructors clearly define their objectives that in a way is understandable for the student. When I see this, the average person would see "pass, no pass" and start freaking out. I think it is important that you get an actual grade.

Facilitator Extended Question

So why would someone freak out about getting a P or NP?

Jim's Extended Response

I don't know. Maybe it's just me. I don't know. I just don't like the tone of this syllabus.

Laura

#3 here is very lengthy. I would get lost and bored trying to find my way through it. The instructor repeats a lot. It's worded different, but it is still saying the same thing. Like when it mentions plagiarism and then cheating; it's the same thing. Like when it says, "fabrication" or "obtaining an unfair advantage" that's cheating. There are three paragraphs. "Aiding and abetting" and "Academic dishonesty" that's cheating. It could have been summed up shorter. Then there are three strike outs back here. Good lord, I'd be lost. They need to clean it up before sending it out to students. This instructor would have to spend more time in class explaining what they want because the syllabus is so confusing.

Syllabus #4:**Jim**

Now number 4, it is more what I am use to seeing. It is to the point. It is business, tells you what is going to happen; it outlines the content to a T. It tells you what is going to happen and the weighting of each assignment. This syllabus seems to be geared towards the student.

I think #4 is cool, though. The instructor lists other websites you can use. This is helpful. We live in a very technological, hands on world, so this is good. The instructor directs you to e-learning sites. This is good. Some people are quiet and would rather go to the online site and find answers rather than ask their teachers. Some people don't have the people skills to talk to their instructors.

Facilitator Question 7

Now, look at the syllabus, and look specifically at the course catalog descriptions given. Tell me what you think of the course catalogue descriptions. Do you think they adequately describe a developmental writing class?

Jim

Syllabus #1 doesn't have a course catalogue description. I was focused on how personal the instructor was, that I didn't realize the instructor had left it off. But the instructor does have a course content list and maybe with the demographic, because you know each school has its own demographic, maybe the instructor knows the demographic, especially as varied as the demographic in a developmental class is, and so the instructor knows this is what works for them.

Syllabus #2 seems to describe it. I will say under the course content, there are things you don't have to say. Like I know I will be working on capitalization. There are just some things you don't have to tell me. They could have saved some paper and cut their syllabus down. But the course catalogue description is adequate.

I just don't like syllabus #3. #3 just bothers me. It's choppy; it's confusing; it can be intimidating; it can be inferred in many different ways; it just bothers me.

Syllabus #4 is just short and simple. It's like they think that all the students took the previous developmental course and already know, so they don't need to say everything. This reads like 090 is the buffer to ENG 111.

Laura's Extended Response to Jim

But they should not assume I had 070 or 080. What if I place into 090?

Jim's Extended Response to Laura

That's a good point because I didn't take 070 or 080, so I wouldn't know. Why would you say "continued application of study to achieve writing skills needed for college"? "Student will write unified and coherent paragraphs and essays in standard form" what form? I'm lost. But I still like #4 and #1.

Laura

Syllabus #4, yeah, it seems fine. It says we are going to go back over the basics. It's kind of choppy, but it's okay.

Syllabus #3 is...where is it? Oh, it's on the second page. Why is it on the second page? Oh, yeah, because it's wordy. The course catalogue description is better because it is written out in a way that sounds more focused on the student. Where #4 sounds more business-like, this is what you are going to do, but #3 is in paragraph form explaining what they are going to do and seems more geared toward the student.

This one, syllabus #1 doesn't have one. Bless her heart.

Syllabus #2 is definitely better than #3.

Facilitator Question 8

The next documents are mission statements for developmental programs. After reviewing the mission statements, I have three points I want you to think about: 1) Are the mission statements believable for a developmental writing class? 2) Are the missions obtainable if you think about the types of developmental writing classes you have been in? 3) Are the mission statements accurate for your needs in a developmental writing class?

Laura

I have mission statement #1, and wow. This is not meant for a student. Maybe a professor, but not for a student to read. A student would get offended. The third paragraph says, “the developmental studies program will be both a support system and ladder for underprepared students” that’s a slash to that person who is already thinking you know I’m in developmental, I’m stupid.

Jim’s Extended Response

Underprepared. Wow.

Laura’s Extended Response to Jim

Yes. Underprepared student. I read that and was like “Whoa.” I mean it’s very harsh for a student reading this.

Mission statement #2 is not as harsh. It’s more geared toward the student. It reads like it is believable that they care for the students. They say they are “student centered” and that they want students to take risks, which you have to put yourself out there in order to learn. And they mention “self-motivated learners” which you have to. If you don’t try, you won’t move forward. “Meeting individual educational goals” and “fostering life-long learning”. Once you get your feet wet, and you get a little bit of that foundation where you can encourage, have that success, you’ll be willing to put yourself out there, to try.

Mission statement #4 also says “underprepared student”. That is a slap in the face.

Jim’s Extended Response to Laura

To add on to that, mission statement #4 uses the term “holistic”, which is positive, but then they use the word “underprepared”. Holistic sounds more student friendly and then you go and say underprepared. I think well, you sound great, we are going to be working together; now I’m a dummy.

Laura’s Extended Response to Jim

I think of myself. I wasn’t underprepared. I had just been out of school for 25 years. I hadn’t used it. You don’t use it, you lose it.

Jim’s Extended Response to Laura

And in my case, I was in the working world; I was in the military, so it helped me sharpen my skills. So, everybody’s scenario is different as to why they need the developmental writing class. Like my mom is an alumni of a community college, and she wasn’t underprepared; she was actually over prepared, but she needed to get the backing

to get into the market again. So, saying “underprepared” just has a negative connotation to it.

I like mission statement #3. It is short and to the point and positive. Like when it says the developmental studies department is going to “prepare students for college success and life-long learning” and “strengthen the foundation skills in reading, writing, and mathematics” and “encouraging and developing strategies” all of it. And they don’t use the word “underprepared” the student is called a “learner”, “responsible learners”. The other one was saying, “You’re stupid.”

Jim

Mission statement #4 is good because I know the college’s mission statement, and the department mission statement works well with the college’s mission.

It says that it provides “a foundation for academic success”, which it does. It “instills academic confidence”, which I believe they do. It “encourages self-direction and responsibility”, they do that. And “part of the community”, this institution I know is a forerunner in the community.

Mission statement #3 is awesome if it was for continuing education. For like a person who has been out of school. Words like “life-long learning” make me think of continuing education. “Becoming active, responsible learners” makes me think of like GED, certificate program, or continuing education. There is nothing specific to English.

You are not going to like what I have to say. I don’t like either one of these: #1 and #2 mission statements. #1 is like a military boarding correctional facility. It feels like a hard hand. Like we are here to get you.

Laura’s Extended Response to Jim

Like you are under my foot.

Jim’s Extended Response to Laura

I actually stopped reading after the second paragraph. And I’m not going to read any more because it is just deep. It’s just very deep. The philosophy, the mission statement, they are just trying to say too much.

Laura’s Extended Response to Jim

It creeps me out.

Jim’s Extended Response to Laura

When you read it: “Higher Education should be open to all students”, well obviously. We are here. “The decision to attend college should be made by the student and based upon his or her willingness and ability to put forth the effort necessary for success”, well that’s kind of obvious. “The decision should not be based on past accomplishments or the lack of such accomplishments.” What are you trying to say? I don’t know, and I’m a very bright individual. “Developmental studies program has a commitment to assist students in

their efforts to overcome barriers and enter the main stream of higher education.” Now that right there offends me because it’s like they are saying that because I am in a developmental class I have a barrier, whether it be economic, racial, social, that is walking a fine line. Now the average person in a class may not read this so closely and see that. But when you do look close, you see more stuff.

#2 is good, but I think whoever prepared this was on a coffee break too long or something. It has typos in it. I don’t know. It needs restructured.

So neither #1 nor #2 is believable for me.

Facilitator Question 9

Are there any other comments or suggestions or anything you would like to say before we finish?

Laura

I think all the students in a developmental writing class are focused on helping all students be prepared, whether nontraditional or fresh out of high school, they are nervous and don’t know what to expect. The class worked for me, and I have been successful because of the instructor.

Jim

People get judged a certain way because of the stigma associated with developmental courses. People take that test and freak out that they may be placed in developmental classes. There really is no right or wrong developmental course. But people do see the lower developmental numbered classes as saying someone is not very intellectual. A developmental courses need to address the people and the stigma. I think the one program that I know of offered a summer program to help nontraditional students and high school students prepare for college which is a step in the right direction. They are reaching out into the community; they are reaching out to their incoming students to help them have the resources and be prepared before they even come to orientation. I think it speaks volumes of the school and the educators at the institution and for the program itself. So I think when you address the stigma and people, you help eradicate the fear. And I think the professor and student interaction and the building of rapport, this is what happens then. It helps the professor see the students as more than just underprepared. The student is already scared, and it helps the professors see that they can’t just say go home and write a paper, because they understand the students’ fears.

Focus Group 2

Facilitator Question 1

What is the most valuable information that you think you learned in your developmental writing class.

Cheryl

Well personally I think it was the structure of how to write essays. I was out of school for five years in between high school and college. So just going back through to learn the process again and how the course had it laid out and how the book had it laid out was very beneficial. I still, it's my bible, I still use my book to this day to write essays.

Doug's Response to Laura and the Facilitator

I still have my book too.

Facilitator Extended Question to Responses

So both of you had courses with books that you still use. What was the book?

Cheryl

English 095 Reading and Composition book.

Doug

I had the same book.

Facilitator Extended Question to Responses

What was in the book?

Cheryl

Outlines for the different types of essays. How to write a thesis statement. Main points.

Doug

Formats for writing.

Facilitator Question 2

What do you think is the most invaluable information you learned in your developmental writing class?

Doug

I don't believe I can think of anything.

Cheryl

I'd have to agree. I can't remember. Well, maybe the whole inferencing thing. I could have done without that, but yet, noticing that other people in the class were having difficulties with it, so it was beneficial for the rest of the class, just not for me.

Facilitator Question 3

Tell me about your overall developmental writing experience.

Cheryl

As a whole for me, it was a great refresher course because, again, I had been out of school for five years. So, just going through the steps of learning how to rewrite things and write things correctly was a great refresher, and it helped strengthen my ability in writing for higher up classes in the next semesters that I have taken and push me towards the level of English writing and reading that I needed.

Doug

I don't think I could have effectively made an argument or get my point across in writing before the class. And I was fresh out of high school. I graduated in May and began college in Fall. I remember my instructor giving me words to add to my vocabulary, like instead of saying "said" or "states" use "asserts". That was probably like the best thing I took from the class. Effectively using my vocabulary and getting my argument or point across.

Facilitator Question 4

Do you believe the developmental writing class was necessary for you to be successful in other college level classes?

Cheryl

When I first went in there, I thought it was a joke because with what we started out with, I thought I already knew. But once we got into the different types of essays, like cause and effect, that's the essay I struggled with the most. I didn't understand it. But once the steps got broken down, I thought it was very beneficial for me to remain in the class. And the class did become very helpful for the other English classes I have taken. And now, being an English major at a four year university, I still go back to that book and look over that material to make sure I'm writing those types of essays correctly.

Doug

Without a doubt. Everyone was telling me to retake the placement test because I had just gotten out of high school, and I guess they had placed into both developmental math and English classes and then retook the test and tested out of the developmental classes. But I chose not to do that and to just take the class. And it was worth it.

Facilitator Question 5

Is there something you weren't taught that you wish you would have been taught in the developmental writing class?

Doug

No. I believe it prepared me for ENG 111. In fact, I think I learned more about writing in ENG 095 than I did in ENG 111. The teacher I had for ENG 111 didn't seem like he should

have been there as the teacher. All we did was write. We had 5 things to do. There was no instruction. It was just do these 5 things and that was it.

Cheryl

The only thing I can think of is that there was one type of essay that we wrote in ENG 111 that we didn't do in ENG 095. So I struggled, but I came to my former developmental studies instructor for advice on it. I don't remember what type of essay it was, but that was the only thing. I think it was the Exemplification. But I sought out advice for it.

Facilitator Question 6

I have three syllabi from different institutions and different developmental writing classes. Review the syllabi. If you were a student in these classes and you read the documents as what would be happening in the classes, do the words and the tone of the document make you feel as if the instructor's intentions are focused on your success?

Doug

I like the layout of #2. But I like #1 because on the first page, right away it says "get involved". This stands out because syllabus tend to be so cliché, talking about plagiarism and the class schedule. Telling us to get involved is different and positive because that is how you really learn anyway. It says you need to communicate with other students with similar interest. I like that because that is how people learn. Then on the second page, it's talking about being proactive with your education.

Cheryl

#3 I'm not so happy about. The format just seems too elongated. I know that sounds weird but the front page could be condensed. I also don't like how this is a pass or no pass class. I hate when it's just pass or no pass. I want a grade because I want to know how far up I passed or how far down I was. So I don't like how it's pass/no pass. I feel that the student might barely of passed and might not realize that they were just on the line.

Doug

Honestly, I would have never read #3 or #2. I would have been frustrated by the waste of the paper to print. But see this #1, I would have read "get involved" and the next page about being proactive. Words like that catch my eye because they create a tone that make me feel like I'm going to be more successful or part of the class.

Facilitator Question 7

Look at the course catalogue descriptions. As you are looking at the course catalogue descriptions, do they adequately describe a developmental writing class?

Cheryl

Well, #1 syllabus doesn't even have the course catalogue description. So, #1 I would be questioning what this class is about and what we are going to learn.

Facilitator Extended Question

Is it necessary to be there on a syllabus?

Cheryl's Extended Response

I think so.

Doug's Extended Response

Yes. I like to know.

Cheryl's Extended Response

A one sentence description for #4 seems, um, interesting.

Facilitator Extended Question

Why interesting?

Doug's Extended Response

First of all, there is a reason people are in the developmental class, and this doesn't even cover any of it. It's too short.

Cheryl's Extended Response

So it says: "Continued study and application." So what are you continuing to study? Like where are they coming from? If someone is coming into this class at this level they wouldn't know what they are continuing to study.

Doug's Extended Response

Yes. It' not broke down enough even for me, and I've been through a developmental writing class. I like a more detailed description.

Doug

I like #3. Certain words pop out like "helping students." I like to hear stuff like that.

Cheryl's

#2 seems more college appropriate because of the wording. That's what I would expect because that is what I have seen before when looking at the course descriptions at the different colleges I have attended. For #3, the only thing I don't like is the pass/no pass. That just bothers me.

Doug

I don't care for #4's description. I just don't. It is a college level description of a class but this is a developmental writing class, and I think this is just too college level for the students. I can read it, and it's okay. But, again, I like the one that used more positive words like "helping" because they are already bummed out that they are taking a refresher course. I know I was because I was fresh out of high school, so I was like why am I having to take this course. That's why I debated on whether or not to retake the placement exam again.

Cheryl's Extended Response

But then noticing the students, I've tutored them before for the developmental writing classes, the students I tutored wouldn't understand most of these words because they are too college level.

Facilitator Extended Question

Like what words?

Cheryl's Extended Response

Um, "proficiency", "comprehension", "syntactically", I don't even think I just got that word right.

Doug's Extended Response

That's why I like #3. It uses more words that students would know. They're simple; they're nice. I just like the "helping". Simple word, but it feels good.

Facilitator Question 8

Do you think that the developmental class in any way hindered your plan to continue your education?

Cheryl's Response

For me, I felt like it hindered me at first because I was not only taking developmental English but also developmental math. But I aced both of those, and it gave me a very cushy 4.0 gpa for the semester. And I did think it would put me behind because I had to take the developmental courses, but I did manage to graduate in two-years. So, all in all, it did not hinder me. It helped me move forward and to get the 4.0 that first semester after being out of school for five years and absolutely despising English throughout my younger years, it really made me want to continue on and work towards my bachelors and masters now.

Doug

For me it didn't discourage me to continue to get an education. The only thing I think I may have been debating was to just get a transfer core diploma instead of an associates to make it to a four year college quicker. But I did choose to graduate with an associates. I knew it was going to put me behind because that first semester I took two developmental courses, English and math, and a college success class, so only one class that I took that semester counted towards my degree. But after weighing my options, I chose to get the degree before moving forward to a four year college.

Facilitator Question 9

Are there any other comments or suggestions or thoughts you would like to share before we finish?

Cheryl's Response

Overall, the developmental course actually made me find my passion for what I want to do. I would love to work at the college level or in high school with this developmental level of English. It made me want to be an instructor of developmental English.

Doug

The instructors at this level are important. They are more concerned with the students' success and that is important. In ENG 111, they already knew what they wanted done and there wasn't much guidance, unlike the developmental classes.

Appendix D: Interview Questions

For participants currently enrolled in developmental writing courses:

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class is right for you?
2. Are you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?
3. Are you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?
4. Do you utilize sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance like tutoring services and/or instructor office hours?
5. Do you feel a part of the college community while you are taking developmental writing classes?
6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?
7. Do you anticipate continuing your college education?

For participants who completed developmental writing courses and are completing or have completed credit writing courses:

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class was right for you?
2. Were you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?
3. Were you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?
4. Were you satisfied with the outcome of your developmental writing class?
5. Did you feel a part of the college community while you were taking developmental writing classes?
6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?
7. What major factors influenced your decision to continue your college education?

Appendix E: Face-To-Face Interview

The following interview was conducted with a participant, Corban, who completed developmental writing courses and is completing or has completed credit writing courses.

Interviewer Question 1

Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class was right for you?

Corban

For me, I think yeah. Uh, just from the fact that uh you don't understand how severe your skills are until you start getting in the course and understand the requirements that you need for and once you start taking the classes you start understanding alright maybe yeah I really did need this developmental class. At first you don't want to accept the reality of the fact that you need to start from the bottom to get to where you need to be. I think that's probably the hardest part about that.

Interviewer Question 2

Were you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?

Corban

At some times yeah. I felt like some of the stuff was more elementary. Some of the stuff I felt like I already grasped, I already understood. And other things that went along with those I felt like oh okay now I know why I am in here because I didn't know how to put this verb with that word or quote this the right way. There's a lot of things that go in there that that you can get into trouble for and you don't really understand if you don't quote the right person and then you turn something in and then it's not quoted correctly it can be uh plagiarism. So those important things like that.

Interviewer Question 3

Were you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?

Corban

Some teachers that...like my first teacher here for English I think was um my first teacher here was probably one of the worst teachers I had. It's because...I mean...she was...it wasn't the fact that she didn't know what she was talking about...it's just that she was really relaxed about what she needed to be teaching. And I really think she didn't take it as important as other people take the class. She felt like, oh, it's just a developmental class. They'll understand it without me having to actually teach it to them. It will be no problem. Um, I felt like it was kinda unorganized. Then I got to the other teachers and I started to say okay wow now this is what I was expecting...this is how I like to be taught. That was only one small experience. You know we always have a bad teacher here or there. Um, I try to give them the benefit of the doubt because maybe it's just their type or way for teaching. I try to figure that out you know and after I give them the benefit of the doubt after that and they prove me wrong then I figure it it's not me it's them.

Interviewer Question 4

Were you satisfied with the outcome of your developmental writing class?

Corban

No answer.

Interviewer Question 5

Did you feel a part of the college community while you were taking developmental writing classes?

Corban

While taking developmental classes, yeah, I felt a part of Pitt. Um, all courses that you take out here at Pitt they kinda make you feel a part of college even if not the college life then the community college life. I mean they tell you what's going on um some classes will require less attention from you than others and some teachers are more cheery about the school and how everything is....kinda like that cheerleader type....lets you know about different programs and stuff like that and other teachers are like look I like this school this is how it is but I'm going to tell you the bare minimum. If you want to do anything else then you need to go out and find it on your own.

Interviewer Question 6

Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?

Corban

I think mines was pretty good cause I still go back to teachers and talk to them and say you know um I'm in English 113 and they say okay you're doing good and I'm like yeah I am doing good. And I'm like I wouldn't be able to do as good as I am doing now if I hadn't taken your developmental class. And she was like you know what I'm glad that you come back and tell me this because I see from experience that people who get placed straight into ENG 111 and don't have to go to a developmental they kinda lost because they don't know what they are actually doing so developmental is kinda good for some people and they don't really know it. And some people think they are more smarter than they perceive to be and they don't want to go down to make sure that what they are doing is correct.

Interviewer Question 7

What major factors influenced your decision to continue your college education?

Corban

I took a year off from school after graduating from high school because I wasn't really sure if college was for me. I wasn't even really sure if I wanted to go to school again another four years. Um, I worked in the work force and did construction...you know various jobs. I felt like if I'm going to have to work this way my whole life and I looked around and saw people who were working like this I was like the boss only had a community college

education....enough to say I'm smarter enough to be the boss. And I thought if all I have to do is go to school I feel like I can dedicate myself to change stuff around so I can at least be able to be the boss one day or if not the boss then maybe right up under him. I just feel like that's more of my position than to be a worker. So that's why I came to school. I wanted to make a better life for myself.

Interviewer Extended Question

So going through the developmental classes didn't discourage you from continuing at all?

Corban's Extended Response

At times, yeah. At times I was like....some semesters I was like oh my gosh I don't think I'm going to make it through this semester. I kept asking myself how am I going to do this? But then I was like well I'm in it now. I was like I'm not going to quit, I'm not going to quit. I was like I'm going to go through as far as I can go until they say you can't do it. So I kept that mentality no matter how much the teacher said this class is hard I was like well I'm going to see how hard it is. And put everything I could into making at least a good grade in it. I constantly reminded myself of my grandfather's words: "Success means giving up fun for a little while in order to get what you want in the end."

Appendix F: Email Interview Responses

Participants Currently or Previously Enrolled in Developmental Writing Courses

The following email interview responses were conducted with participants who are currently or previously enrolled in developmental writing courses.

Email Interview A

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class is right for you?
I felt at the time that I was more advanced than the developmental classes I placed into.
2. Are you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?
I felt as though I was more advanced than the content I was being taught.
3. Are you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?
I was satisfied with the instruction of my developmental writing class.
4. Do you utilize sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance like tutoring services and/or instructor office hours?
I have never utilized sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance because in regards to English I didn't need the extra assistance.
5. Do you feel a part of the college community while you are taking developmental writing classes?
I have always felt a part of the college community, since I have been enrolled at Pitt Community College.
6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?
Overall I would describe my developmental writing experience as great. I became so accustomed to taking English classes that I even took a few English's that were required.
7. Do you anticipate continuing your college education?
I anticipate continuing my college education until I can acquire a Master's or a Doctoral degree; I am not sure exactly what I want to do as far as a career choice. I am leaning towards doing Safety and Health Administration or Computer Science.

Email Interview B

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class is right for you?
Yes, it helped me to understand a lot of rules.
2. Are you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?
Yes I am. There was a lot of different activities or assignments which made my developmental class even more interesting.

3. Are you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?
Sometimes it was a big amount of writing or reading in a short period of time. But in generally speaking, I'm satisfied.
4. Do you utilize sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance like tutoring services and/or instructor office hours?
The only two sources I've utilized were instructor office hours and internet.
5. Do you feel a part of the college community while you are taking developmental writing classes?
Sure! Why should I feel different? I'm in college, studying. There is my instructor, there are my classmates. The level of communication between teacher and students definitely helps to realize that you are not in high school anymore.
6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?
It was interesting, sometimes too much and sometimes just right there. But again, generally speaking, I had good experiences and highly appreciated my teachers who helped me to improve my English skills. Sometimes as a foreigner I had hard times understanding what is going on, but teachers were highly professional and explained things very well.
7. Do you anticipate continuing your college education?
This is what I'm doing right now. I'm not going to leave college without successfully completing my education and getting my degree.

Email Interview C

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class is right for you?
Yes, because I understood English but it was just my weakness.
2. Are you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?
Yes, it helped me out a lot. It helps build my confidence for writing different pieces of work.
3. Are you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?
Yes and No. Yes because the goal of the class is to help make you understand and prepare for the higher English. No because I don't think in order to pass the class you have to write a paper and let that determine if you pass or fail. Especially if you have been doing good in class.
4. Do you utilize sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance like tutoring services and/or instructor office hours?
Yes I did because I wanted to make sure all my work was doing correctly.
5. Do you feel a part of the college community while you are taking developmental writing classes?

Yes. Because I'm still getting college credit

6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?
Overall I would describe my developmental experience as good. I loved the instructor I had and the information helped me. But to be honest, in order for some of the people who want to stay focused in the class, the instructor has to kind of put there self in the students shoes instead of just throwing the information out to them because a lot of people want understand.
7. Do you anticipate continuing your college education?
Yes. In fact I am attending a community college right now for my associates degree in Automotive System Technology.

Email Interview D

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class is right for you?
I think it was because in high school I struggled with English, especially my junior and senior year. My main struggle was writing research papers.
2. Are you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?
Yes, although I don't remember going over any research paper techniques, but then again it's been five years since I have taken this class.
3. Are you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?
I am, I felt like it helped prepare me for the future two English classes I had to take. I did well in Eng 111 and Eng 114.
4. Do you utilize sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance like tutoring services and/or instructor office hours?
No, I felt like I was getting enough help from the lab hours we had for Eng 095.
5. Do you feel a part of the college community while you are taking developmental writing classes?
Of course. I was taking other classes towards my degree while taking the remedial class, so it just felt like I was taking another normal college class.
6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?
Very good. I remember having a good teacher for both the class and the lab. This class helped me better understand the technical parts of writing, sentences and nouns and verbs.
7. Do you anticipate continuing your college education?
Yes, I did continue after taking a break the semester I finished my remedial classes. I will have my Associate's in Criminal Justice this December.

Email Interview E

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class is right for you?
Yes I was prepared for English 111; I went right into it after I graduated high school. Also I was prepared for English 112 after that too. I didn't struggle in either of those classes. Most of my teachers have said that I am an above average writer. I don't particularly like writing though, mostly because I have poor handwriting and spelling skills (although Microsoft word takes care of those issues).

2. Are you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?
I'm not sure, most of what I learned was just repeated information from high school. The outline format and information gathering techniques were already drilled into me and I found it repetitive. I don't feel like it improved me much as a writer.

The assignments I did were uninteresting. Eng 111 I had to keep a 1 page journal for the semester. I remember procrastinating writing the journal entry 10 minutes before class and really disliking the class. Eng. 112 was better. I wrote a 10 page paper about competitive bodybuilders vs. the stereotypical skinny supermodel.

3. Are you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?
My Eng. 111 teacher was an older guy that wrote computer instruction guides. He was really monotone and just had us format information into MLA and outlines. His teaching style on top of the course material was sleep inducing.

Eng. 112 my teacher was the youngest college teacher I've had. He was probably 27 at the oldest. He was passionate about writing but failed to control the class very well. A lot of the class was older than him, and didn't take feedback well from him. I never had this problem though and he was a good teacher in my opinion.

4. Do you utilize sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance like tutoring services and/or instructor office hours?
I have never used a tutor for any college class. I think it's kind of pointless to get a tutor for an English class because you turn in multiple drafts that the teacher/classmates review and critic always. By the time I have written a couple drafts, my papers were always fleshed out and improved.
5. Do you feel a part of the college community while you are taking developmental writing classes?
I'm not sure I understand this question. I think that an English class is the first class every student should take. Me personally I've never felt like I belonged to the college in a school spirit sense. It's not the fault of the English department I just don't think my personality allows me to think that way.
6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?
I think my developmental writing classes were mostly just something I had to do for credits. The information that helped most was with MLA formatting, but if I write a

paper for any class I still have to Google MLA formatting. The classes were demanding in the sense of work I had to put into them, but easy enough. I think I gained little from them but I also had less trouble than my class mates.

7. Do you anticipate continuing your college education?
Yes I will be transferring to a four year institution at the end of this current semester. I'm worried that community college was a mistake and I will find being at a University too challenging.

Email Interview F

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class is right for you?
I didn't feel as if it was right for me. All it did for me was reviewing what I had already learned in my previous high school English class.
2. Are you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?
Sure, I am done with it now but in reality it just slowed me down.
3. Are you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?
Yes, the teacher taught what needed to be taught.
4. Do you utilize sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance like tutoring services and/or instructor office hours?
No I have not; I plan on using the services this semester. In this case not for my English class.
5. Do you feel a part of the college community while you are taking developmental writing classes?
Not exactly, I feel as if I am back in high school all over again. Not taking anything away from the teacher that I had in the past.
6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?
It was slow in a good way. Like I stated, the teachers focused on specific problems that students were having and they did well. I think that the developmental English that I took should've counted more.
7. Do you anticipate continuing your college education?
Yes, I want to do all that I can now while I am in school.

Email Interview G

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class is right for you?
I do believe that my placement in a developmental class was right for me because it helped me out in the long run when it came to me taking English 111-114 classes. I feel that in high school my English teachers didn't really teach me well or help me

learn English the proper way. I am thankful for having taken the developmental classes because I now have a better understanding of English.

2. Are you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?

I am very satisfied with the content of my developmental class. I learned so much and was able to understand things so much better than I did before taking the class. As a writer myself the class helped me out a lot.

3. Are you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?

The instructions in my developmental writing class was don every well. Like I said before I was able to learn so much in the class and I had a really wonderful instructor whom was able to break things down to help us learn well. By the end of the class we were asking less questions and were able to see the improvement in ourselves from the time we started till then.

4. Do you utilize sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance like tutoring services and/or instructor office hours?

Without the resource offered outside of the classroom I think I would have been lost. When writing a paper I was always at the writing center to make sure I was going in the right direction with my paper and to make sure that all my formatting was correct. In the end the class I felt more confident with my writing because of the help from the writing center that I received.

5. Do you feel a part of the college community while you are taking developmental writing classes?

I felt much a part of the community college while taking the class. Not once did I feel that I was not a part of the community college. The class was just like the rest of my other college classes that I was taking, the only difference was that I was learning something that I already knew but just needed some improvement with.

6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?

My developmental writing experience was a great experience. I learned so much in the class and was even able to improve some of the things that I already knew but just struggled with. My instructor was a wonderful instructor and taught me so much more than I could have ever imagined to learn in a developmental class. Today as a writer myself, I am so thankful that I took the developmental class.

7. Do you anticipate continuing your college education?

I have been continuing my college career going on three years now. There was no doubt in my mind that I was not going to end my college career. I will keep on continuing it until I walk across that stage dressed up in a cap and gown and handed a degree that I worked my butt off for.

Email Interview H

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class is right for you?

I do feel my placement in a developmental writing class was right for me, there were things from previous learning that I did not remember.

2. Are you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?
I was satisfied with the content of my developmental writing class because it prepared me for my next writing classes that I needed to take.
3. Are you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?
I was very satisfied with the instruction because my teacher was very thorough and helpful with the material she taught.
4. Do you utilize sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance like tutoring services and/or instructor office hours?
I did not utilize any outside sources because my instructor made sure I understood the material and I felt like I did not need the extra help.
5. Do you feel a part of the college community while you are taking developmental writing classes?
I did feel part of the college community while taking developmental writing classes because I knew I was being prepared with the necessary material I needed to further my college education.
6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?
My developmental writing experience was very helpful in teaching me the material that I needed to learn.
7. Do you anticipate continuing your college education?
I do plan to continue my college education for as long as I need to until I reach my goal.

Email Interview I

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class is right for you?
Yes, I started with 095 to 098 to 111. I had been out of school for 30 years.
2. Are you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?
Yes I was satisfied with the content. I enjoyed the class that my instructor taught and learned a lot from her.
3. Are you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?
Yes, I thought the instruction was right for myself.
4. Do you utilize sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance like tutoring services and/or instructor office hours?
No, I did not need any tutoring for English.

5. Do you feel a part of the college community while you are taking developmental writing classes?

Yes, I always felt a part of the community college.

6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?

It was very interesting and I learned a lot.

7. Are you planning to continue your college education?

Yes, I am pursuing a degree in Human Service Technologist.

Email Interview J

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class is right for you?

Yes, I didn't get through high school so I didn't know much English at all.

2. Are you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?

Yes, I started with reading first then continued with English.

3. Are you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?

Yes, If it weren't for them I wouldn't of completed college English.

4. Do you utilize sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance like tutoring services and/or instructor office hours?

I used family members and grammar check on word.

5. Do you feel a part of the college community while you are taking developmental writing classes?

Yes, they helped me while some high school graduates didn't understand English.

6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?

Enjoyed it, and had wonderful teachers that worked one on one if anyone or I didn't understand.

7. Do you anticipate continuing your college education?

Yes, I am a second year student and on my six semester.

Email Interview K

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class is right for you?

Yes because it helped me a lot on papers that I wasn't use to. Making sure my grammar was right and how I opened and closed my papers.

2. Are you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?

Yes I am, I seen the improvement from when I started and when I finished my semester.

3. Are you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?
Yes, my instructor was the best English teacher I have had from my community college.
4. Do you utilize sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance like tutoring services and/or instructor office hours?
Yes, I did use the tutoring program for my final paper which determined if I was going to either pass or fail, and I passed with a high score. So tutoring will always be on the top of the list when I need help with writing a paper.
5. Do you feel a part of the college community while you are taking developmental writing classes?
Yes, I do because even though it may seem easy and make you feel you did it in elementary school it always good to refresh your memory. Some of the stuff I was taught I never learned in school.
6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?
I liked it, even though I had to repeat it twice it really did help me out a lot.
7. Do you anticipate continuing your college education?
Yes I really want to get an degree and maybe come back to school for an higher degree

Email Interview L

1. Yes I feel being placed in a developmental writing class was right for me because before the class I really didn't like writing essays, or reach papers because I didn't know where or how to start.
2. Yes I am pleased with the classes that I was placed in.
3. The teacher that I had for my developmental writing class was very helpful and understanding with me and my level of writing skills that I had, my also teacher worked very hard with me and never made me feel as if was not going to make it.
4. Yes I would go to the tutoring building for help or see my teacher during their office hours.
5. Yes I felt like I was a part of the college community.
6. My overall experience in developmental writing class was good my classmates were nice and we all would help each other out even outside of class.
7. I am very happy to continue with going to college and reaching my goals .

Email Interview M

1. No, the things learned were way under grade level.
2. It was pointless, when entered Eng. III everything was taught over differently.
3. No, as previously stated, the instructor taught things that weren't useful in Eng. 111.
4. No, I did not use any outside sources; for the most part everything was self-explanatory.
5. No, I was very distant. It felt like a class for outsiders.

6. Overall my developmental class was a big waste of time, very useless towards my Eng. 111.
7. Yes, I will continue my college education.

Email Interview N

1. I felt as though it was rudimentary. I was placed automatically but the course material was extremely simplistic.
2. The aforementioned dissatisfaction above about covers it.
3. She was a great instructor but the material provided left her limited.
4. Yes. I expected to pass the course with a great grade.
5. Not really. My community college is not a very 'welcoming' campus. It seems as though the different departments and even the instructors in the departments are competing with each other. Frankly, it feels limited and if you think about it, there are several community colleges within 45 minutes of mine which probably adds to this feel of desperation that my community college holds.
6. It was basic at best and I felt as though I was back in High School.
7. Growing up in a strong Italian household, I started doing manual labor at 9. After doing my first construction gig at 12 I said I'm not doing that for the rest of my life. Most of my friend's parents were/are working class and it's a constant struggle to succeed.

Email Interview O

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class is right for you?
No, I did not feel that I should have been placed in developmental English. I feel that English is one of my strongest subjects. I am not a good test taker, so that might have been a reason I did not place directly into ENG 111.
2. Are you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?
I was satisfied with the content in the writing class. I felt as though I knew a lot of the information already about the writing. It was a fast paced class and required the students to be on top of their homework and writings.
3. Are you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?
I was very satisfied with the instruction in my class. My teacher was very helpful and tried to make the information fun to learn about. We did a lot of group activities that allowed us to participate with other students. My teacher always offered us his time to help and to review things if students were not sure of something.
4. Do you utilize sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance like tutoring services and/or instructor office hours?
I did utilize outside sources. I used the SmartThinking tutor that helped review my papers before I turned it in. The SmartThinking was very helpful and allowed me to realize what was wrong in the paper and what I needed to do to correct it.

5. Do you feel a part of the college community while you are taking developmental writing classes?

I felt a part of the community because I was in a classroom at the school. Also I was engaging with other students in the classroom, which made me feel more engaged with the community college. Taking the class, knowing I would not get a credit transfer for it, was always in the back of my head and upset me a lot. Overall, I did feel a part of the community college.

6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?

I would say that my developmental writing experience was good. I did learn a few things from the class, but a lot of the information given in the class I knew from previous years of schooling. I felt since my teacher had the students participate together, I connected with students and we would all help each other out if we needed the help. Last but not least, the class made me more on top of my work and not procrastinates as much as I previously did for schoolwork.

7. Do you anticipate continuing your college education?

Yes I anticipate continuing my college education. I want to take as many classes the community college can offer me so I do not have to take them at the four year university. It saves me a lot of money and I do not mind attending the community college. After finishing at the community college, I plan to transfer to a four year university. I am not quite sure what I would like to major in yet, but I do know that I want to get my masters in Occupational Therapy.

Email Interview P

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class is right for you?
Yes, I've been out of school for over 10 yrs. I found the courses to very helpful refresh.

2. Are you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?
Yes, writing is very important, and the instructor is also.

3. Are you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?
Yes. My instructor is a very good and patient instructor.

4. Do you utilize sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance like tutoring services and/or instructor office hours?
Yes, first I go to see my instructor, during her office hours. And then to proof -read my papers or additional questions I go to the tutor office.

5. Do you feel a part of the college community while you are taking developmental writing classes
Yes, I have additional classes such as Student Success and Social ology.

6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?

Fun, informative, and a challenge.

7. Do you anticipate continuing your college education?

Yes

Email Interview Q

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class is right for you?
I felt as though it was because I don't like English too well and isn't the greatest in it either.
2. Are you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?
I was very satisfied because it prepared me a whole lot for the complicated more English's that I would have to take for my major.
3. Are you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?
Yes I am more so the teachers because they really helped me get a better understanding and the way they taught the class was interesting and not boring.
4. Do you utilize sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance like tutoring services and/or instructor office hours?
No I don't take use of the tutor sessions but I definitely take advantage of my previous English teachers office hours as well as my current English office hours.
5. Do you feel a part of the college community while you are taking developmental writing classes?
Yes because everybody can't start off knowing everything off hand, I mean somebody has to actually need some type of extra help.
6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?
It was the best part of starting off in college because now I don't have to look crazy in the face when I'm sitting with other kids that understood because I started out at the bottom and worked my way to the top.
7. Do you anticipate continuing your college education?
Yes I do I'm continuing now as we speak doing my English 111 work and other courses as well.

Email Interview R

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class is right for you?
The only reason I was placed into a developmental writing class in fall of 2010 was because I missed the placement test by two points and never went back to re test. I felt as though the class was fairly easy and I did enjoy the book we read. The class helped me to adapt back into going to school, considering the fact that I took a year off after high school.

2. Are you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?
Yes, I was satisfied with my developmental English class. It helped me to adjust back to going to school. My teacher was a lot of help and helped me to improve on my essay writing.
3. Are you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?
Yes I was satisfied with the instruction of my developmental English 95. It was a semester long class so I didn't have the stress of worrying about making an 80 or better on my essays unlike the people who are now taking the classes.
4. Do you utilize sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance like tutoring services and/or instructor office hours?
I did not take time out to see my instructor during his office hours because it was a night class and he was a part time teacher. I would take time to talk to my teacher either before or after class if I had any questions.
5. Do you feel like a part of the college community while you are taking developmental writing classes?
Yes in a way I did because I was also attending regular education classes. Even though the class was a night class I still felt like I was part of the community college.
6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?
Overall my experience was very good, I felt like the class helped me adjust back into being at school.
7. Do you anticipate continuing your college education?
Yes, my goals are to finish at the community college with an AA degree then continue on to get my bachelors and masters in Social work.

Email Interview S

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class is right for you?
I thought that the Eng class that I had placed on was right. Since I was not born or raised here I still learn more about English and I did learned more with the classes I took.
2. Are you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?
I was satisfied. There were some things that I had to write and I learned the proper way to do some papers.
3. Are you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?
Yes, I thought that they were pretty clear and usually I did not have any problems understanding.

4. Do you utilize sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance like tutoring services and/or instructor office hours?
I usually do not. I am a person who tries to find out by myself and solve problems or do homework by myself.
5. Do you feel a part of the college community while you are taking developmental writing classes?
Yes, there are so many people who do start with developmental classes and that is also a way to meet students.
6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?
I had a good experience, I cannot complain I had good teachers who were nice and very clear about the class.
7. Do you anticipate continuing your college education?
Yes! I do not want to stop, I want to become something and whatever I do I want to be able to help people in some way.

Email Interview T

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class is right for you?
At the time yes I did, only because I had been out of school for such a long time.
2. Are you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?
Yes I was satisfied; it was a great course to refresh my memory.
3. Are you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?
I was happy with the instruction. There were a few things I felt were not needed.
4. Do you utilize sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance like tutoring services and/or instructor office hours?
Personally I have never used any out of class assistance, but I do know that things are in place if I was ever to need help.
5. Do you feel a part of the college community while you are taking developmental writing classes?
I am an older student so I really don't focus on that aspect of school. I felt the same in the developmental class as I do in ENG 231, so I guess my answer is yes.
6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?
My experience was good. I feel as though I needed a refresher course and I was glad it was only a mini semester. This allowed me to take ENG 111 in the same semester which was really nice.
7. Do you anticipate continuing your college education?

I definitely plan on continuing my education. I go to school on the GI bill so I will take full advantage of my opportunity.

Email Interview U

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class is right for you?
No, the developmental English class I took was way to easy for me.
2. Are you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?
I guess I don't really remember the content. I took the class a couple years ago.
3. Are you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?
Yes it was very simple and basic.
4. Do you utilize sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance like tutoring services and/or instructor office hours?
I used the library to print out my papers and talked with my teacher outside of class.
5. Do you feel a part of the college community while you are taking developmental writing classes?
Not really. It kind of makes you feel below everyone else.
6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?
I feel like I did okay in the class and it was good practice for my higher English classes.
7. Do you anticipate continuing your college education?
Yes for many more years.

Email Interview V

1. Although I was placed into developmental English my first semester here, I do not think that it helped me out tremendously. I have always been strong in English and writing and was placed in that just because of one test score.
2. I was not satisfied with being in development English class because it was not focused on the content I needed help with. We watched a few movies and read one book and it was not focused on issues I needed help with.
3. This relates to question two. The content I needed to learn was not taught in the class.
4. No.
5. I did feel like part of the community college during the classes.
6. I believe that it should not be based off of one test score. I exceled in high school with English but was set back in college due to one test score that did not accurately show my performance.
7. I do anticipate furthering my college career. I am on my second year college and will be transferring to a four year university for criminal justice.

Email Interview W

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class is right for you?
I most definitely feel my placement into developmental English was right for me. I have learning disabilities in English and when I started college at the community college it had been 8 years since I had been in school.
2. Are you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?
I am very satisfied with the content of my developmental English class. I believe having to write so many papers was very helpful. Also the journals we wrote helped a great deal with helping me get the format for a complete sentence. My instructor had a great approach to teaching and breaking the material down so we could understand it.
3. Are you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?
Yes I was very satisfied with the instruction. When I started in the developmental English class I could not write a “C” paper. I would cry and cry and stress myself out. By the end of this course, I wrote a “A” paper with confidence. When I took English 111, I was writing “A” papers every time.
4. Do you utilize sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance like tutoring services and/or instructor office hours?
I did utilize resources outside of the classroom for writing assistance. I would often visit the English teacher I had in high school and get her to proof read my papers or ask my mom to read the material after I read it to see if we comprehended it the same way.
5. Do you feel a part of the college community while you are taking developmental writing classes?
Often time I felt like I was still in high school, though I do not feel like it had anything to do with the college or the instructor. I got that feeling from classmates who could not follow rules and always disrupted the class.
6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?
I was very pleased with my developmental writing experience because I gained confidence in writing. My instructor, was a wonderful person who made you work hard but was very encouraging. She always strived to make class enjoyable.
7. Do you anticipate continuing your college education?
I am continuing my education at this time. I am currently in the Associate Degree of Nursing program.

Email Interview X

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class is right for you?

I felt like my placement in a developmental writing class wasn't right for me but it did help me overall.

2. Are you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?
Yes I am satisfied with the content of my developmental writing class because it helped me to understand the smaller things and it also helped refresh my memory.
3. Are you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?
The instruction of my developmental writing class was very basic and step by step so I am satisfied with that.
4. Do you utilize sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance like tutoring services and/or instructor office hours?
I go to the lab or study hall as well as having a tutor, so I do utilize my sources outside of the classroom.
5. Do you feel a part of the college community while you are taking developmental writing classes?
Yes, I do feel a part of a community while taking this class because the teachers and the surrounding.
6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?
My experience was a very good and successful one I learned the basics very well.
7. Do you anticipate continuing your college education?
I am currently continuing my college education and I will not stop until I graduate.

Email Interview Y

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class is right for you?
Yes my placement in developmental writing class was right for me because it helps a person know how to use proper English when writing and speaking.
2. Are you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?
Yes I was satisfied because I had a good instructor that had an effective way of teaching.
3. Are you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?
Yes because the instructor made everything clear before giving assignments
4. Do you utilize sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance like tutoring services and/or instructor office hours?
Yes because the more assistance the more detailed the writing is and the better the grade.

5. Do you feel a part of the college community while you are taking developmental writing classes?
Yes because the class does group discussions and it makes the class feel as one.
6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?
My experience has been real because it took a lot of research, reading and a lot of rewriting just to get a paper approved for a good grade
7. Do you anticipate continuing your college education?
Yes I'm currently enrolled at a community college.

Email Interview Z

1. Do you feel as though your placement in a developmental writing class is right for you?
Yes the Placement was a great for me because I had been out of School 10 years and the refresher to English worked out well so I wasn't lost in Eng 111.
2. Are you satisfied with the content of your developmental writing class?
The Content off my Class was great It felt like I was back in high school doing the basics and learning more about MLA format When I was in School we were not taught MLA format.
3. Are you satisfied with the instruction of your developmental writing class?
Yes the instructions were great the teacher helped a lot and also allowed for us to do peer to peer were we could help collaborate with class mates for resources.
4. Do you utilize sources outside of the classroom for writing assistance like tutoring services and/or instructor office hours?
Yes it's always great to visit the office or tutoring it was free to me and the help of the teacher and the tortures helped out at a time of writers block and for more resources to pull from.
5. Do you feel a part of the college community while you are taking developmental writing classes?
Yes I fell part even though I was in development English I was encouraged to attend events that college would host and I still received all the benefits that others were offered even though I was in developmental English.
6. Overall, how would you describe your developmental writing experience?
The opportunity and experience that I received was great do to the fact that MLA format was not thought and my grammar spelling and all of the English stuff is not up to par so I do my Best If I was not offered the English developmental class I Probably Still be in English 111 struggling to this day.
7. Do you anticipate continuing your college education?
Yes I did continue my college education I ended up receiving 3 associates degree From the community college Automotive, Electrical Electronics, and Electronic

Engineering and currently pursuing HVAC degree I also Have a total of 176 credit hours from the community college and am working in the automotive trade at a local motor company.

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